

"WHY, WHAT CAN YOU WANT WITH DOMBEY & SON'S?" "TO KNOW THE WAY THERE, IF YOU PLEASE."—P. 40.

DOMBEY & SON.

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. BARNARD.

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PREFACE.

I MAKE so bold as to believe that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing the characters of men is a rare one. I have not even found, within my experience, that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing so much as the faces of men is a general one by any means. The two commonest mistakes in judgment that I suppose to arise from the former default are, the confounding of shyness with arrogance—a very common mistake indeed—and the not understanding that an obstinate nature exists in a perpetual struggle with itself.

Mr. Dombey undergoes no violent change, either in this book, or in real life. A sense of his injustice is within him all along. The more he represses it, the more unjust he necessarily is. Internal shame and external circumstances may bring the contest to a close in a week, or a day; but it has been a contest for years, and is only fought out after a long balance of victory.

I began this book by the Lake of Geneva; and went on with it for some months in France, before pursuing it in England. The association between the writing and the place of writing is so curiously strong in my mind, that at this day, although I know, in my fancy, every stair in the little Midshipman's house, and could swear to every pew in the church in which Florence was married, or to every young gentleman's bedstead in Doctor Blimber's establishment, I yet confusedly imagine Captain Cuttle as secluding himself from Mrs. MacStinger among the mountains of Switzerland. Similarly, when I am reminded by any chance of what it was that the waves were always saying, my remembrance wanders for a whole winter night about the streets of Paris—as I restlessly did, with a heavy heart, on the night when I had written the chapter in which my little friend and I parted company.

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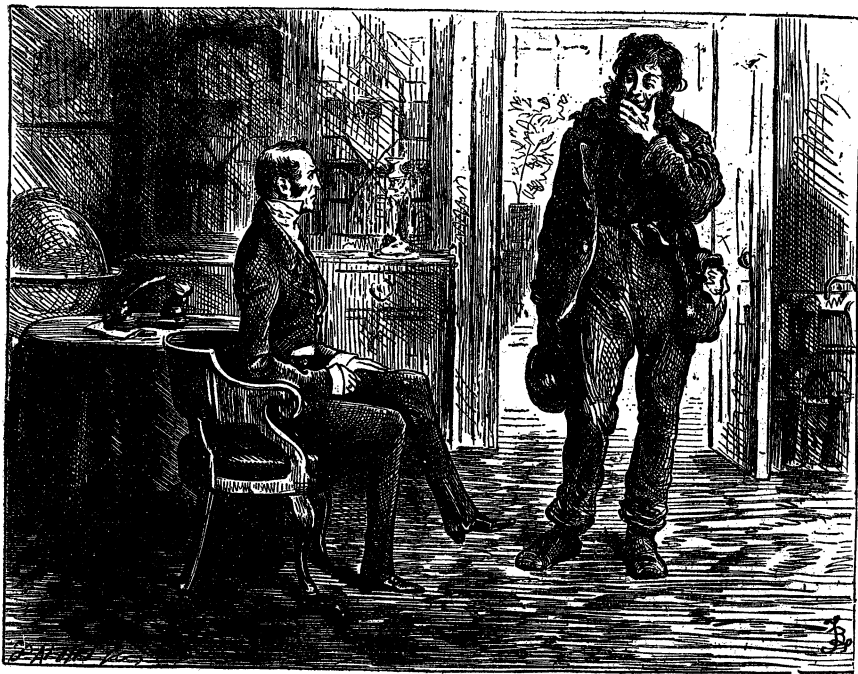
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DOMBEY AND SON.

CHAPTER I.

DOMBEY AND SON.

DOMBEY sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great arm-chair by the bedside, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settle immediately in front of the fire, and close to it, as if his constitution were analogous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new.

Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes. Dombey was rather bald, rather red, and though a handsome, well-made man, too stern and pomp-

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ous in appearance to be prepossessing. Son was very bald, and very red, and though (of course) an undeniably fine infant, somewhat crushed and spotted in his general effect as yet. On the brow of Dombey, Time and his brother Care had set some marks, as on a tree that was to come down in good time—remorseless twins they are for striding through their human forests, notching as they go—while the countenance of Son was crossed and recrossed with a thousand little creases, which the same deceitful Time would take delight in smoothing out and wearing away with the flat part of his scythe, as a preparation of the surface for his deeper operations.

Dombey, exulting in the long-looked-for event, jingled and jingled the heavy gold watch-chain that depended from below his trim blue coat, whereof the buttons sparkled phosphorescently

in the feeble rays of the distant fire. Son, with his little fists curled up and clenched, seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly.

"The House will once again, Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, "be not only in name, but in fact, Dombey and Son; Dom-bey and Son!"

The words had such a softening influence, that he appended a term of endearment to Mrs. Dombey's name (though not without some hesitation, as being a man but little used to that form of address): and said, "Mrs. Dombey, my—my dear."

A transient flush of faint surprise overspread the sick lady's face as she raised her eyes towards him.

"He will be christened Paul, my—Mrs. Dombey—of course."

She feebly echoed, "Of course," or rather expressed it by the motion of her lips, and closed her eyes again.

"His father's name, Mrs. Dombey, and his grandfather's! I wish his grandfather were alive this day!" And again he said "Dom-bey and Son," in exactly the same tone as before.

Those three words conveyed the one idea of Mr. Dombey's life. The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them. A.D. had no concern with *anno Domini*, but stood for *anno Dombei*—and Son.

He had risen, as his father had before him, in the course of life and death, from Son to Dombey, and for nearly twenty years had been the sole representative of the firm. Of those years he had been married ten—married, as some said, to a lady with no heart to give him; whose happiness was in the past, and who was content to bind her broken spirit to the dutiful and meek endurance of the present. Such idle talk was little likely to reach the ears of Mr. Dombey, whom it nearly concerned; and probably no one in the world would have received it with such utter incredulity as he, if it had reached him. Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts. They left that fancy ware to boys and girls, and boarding-schools and books. Mr. Dombey would have reasoned: That a matrimonial alliance with himself *must*, in the nature of things, be gratifying and honour-

able to any woman of common sense. That the hope of giving birth to a new partner in such a house could not fail to awaken a glorious and stirring ambition in the breast of the least ambitious of her sex. That Mrs. Dombey had entered on that social contract of matrimony: almost necessarily part of a genteel and wealthy station, even without reference to the perpetuation of family firms: with her eyes fully open to these advantages. That Mrs. Dombey had had daily practical knowledge of his position in society. That Mrs. Dombey had always sat at the head of his table, and done the honours of his house in a remarkably ladylike and becoming manner. That Mrs. Dombey must have been happy. That she couldn't help it.

Or, at all events, with one drawback. Yes. That he would have allowed. With only one; but that one certainly involving much. They had been married ten years, and, until this present day on which Mr. Dombey sat jingling and jingling his heavy gold watch-chain in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed, had had no issue.

—To speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before, and the child, who had stolen into the chamber unobserved, was now crouching timidly in a corner whence she could see her mother's face. But what was a girl to Dombey and Son? In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested—a bad boy—nothing more.

Mr. Dombey's cup of satisfaction was so full at this moment, however, that he felt he could afford a drop or two of its contents, even to sprinkle on the dust in the by-path of his little daughter.

So he said, "Florence, you may go and look at your pretty brother, if you like, I dare say. Don't touch him!"

The child glanced keenly at the blue coat and stiff white cravat, which, with a pair of creaking boots and a very loud-ticking watch, embodied her idea of a father; but her eyes returned to her mother's face immediately, and she neither moved nor answered.

Next moment, the lady had opened her eyes and seen the child; and the child had run towards her; and, standing on tiptoe, the better to hide her face in her embrace, had clung about her with a desperate affection very much at variance with her years.

"Oh, Lord bless me!" said Mr. Dombey, rising testily. "A very ill-advised and feverish proceeding this, I am sure. I had better ask

Doctor Peps if he'll have the goodness to step up-stairs again, perhaps. I'll go down. I'll go down. I needn't beg you," he added, pausing for a moment at the settee before the fire, "to take particular care of this young gentleman, Mrs. —"

"Blockitt, sir?" suggested the nurse, a simpering piece of faded gentility, who did not presume to state her name as a fact, but merely offered it as a mild suggestion.

"Of this young gentleman, Mrs. Blockitt." "No, sir, indeed. I remember when Miss Florence was born——"

"Ay, ay, ay," said Mr. Dombey, bending over the basket bedstead, and slightly bending his brows at the same time. "Miss Florence was all very well, but this is another matter. This young gentleman has to accomplish a destiny. A destiny, little fellow!" As he thus apostrophized the infant, he raised one of his hands to his lips, and kissed it; then, seeming to fear that the action involved some compromise of his dignity, went, awkwardly enough, away.

Doctor Parker Peps, one of the court physicians, and a man of immense reputation for assisting at the increase of great families, was walking up and down the drawing-room with his hands behind him, to the unspeakable admiration of the family surgeon, who had regularly puffed the case for the last six weeks, among all his patients, friends, and acquaintances, as one to which he was in hourly expectation day and night of being summoned, in conjunction with Doctor Parker Peps.

"Well, sir," said Doctor Parker Peps in a round, deep, sonorous voice, muffled for the occasion, like the knocker; "do you find that your dear lady is at all roused by your visit?"

"Stimulated as it were," said the family practitioner faintly: bowing at the same time to the Doctor, as much as to say, "Excuse my putting in a word, but this is a valuable connection."

Mr. Dombey was quite discomfited by the question. He had thought so little of the patient, that he was not in a condition to answer it. He said that it would be a satisfaction to him if Doctor Parker Peps would walk up-stairs, again.

"Good! We must not disguise from you, sir," said Doctor Parker Peps, "that there is a want of power in her Grace the Duchess—I beg your pardon; I confound names; I should say, in your amiable lady. That there is a certain degree of languor, and a general absence of elasticity, which we would rather—not——"

"See," interposed the family practitioner, with another inclination of the head.

"Quite so," said Doctor Parker Peps, "which we would rather not see. It would appear that the system of Lady Cankaby—excuse me: I should say of Mrs. Dombey: I confuse the names of cases——"

"So very numerous," murmured the family practitioner—"can't be expected I'm sure—quite wonderful if otherwise—Doctor Parker Peps's West-end practice——"

"Thank you," said the Doctor, "quite so. It would appear, I was observing, that the system of our patient has sustained a shock from which it can only hope to rally by a great and strong——"

"And vigorous," murmured the family practitioner.

"Quite so," assented the Doctor—"and vigorous effort. Mr. Pilkins here, who, from his position of medical adviser in this family—no one better qualified to fill that position, I am sure——"

"Oh!" murmured the family practitioner. "Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley."

"You are good enough," returned Doctor Parker Peps, "to say so. Mr. Pilkins, who, from his position, is best acquainted with the patient's constitution in its normal state (an acquaintance very valuable to us in forming our opinions on these occasions), is of opinion with me, that Nature must be called upon to make a vigorous effort in this instance; and that if our interesting friend the Countess of Dombey—I beg your pardon! Mrs. Dombey—should not be——"

"Able," said the family practitioner.

"To make that effort successfully," said Doctor Parker Peps, "then a crisis might arise which we should both sincerely deplore."

With that, they stood for a few seconds looking at the ground. Then, on the motion—made in dumb-show—of Doctor Parker Peps, they went up-stairs; the family practitioner opening the room-door for that distinguished professional; and following him out with most obsequious politeness.

To record of Mr. Dombey that he was not in his way affected by this intelligence would be to do him an injustice. He was not a man of whom it could properly be said that he was ever startled or shocked; but he certainly had a sense within him, that if his wife should sicken and decay, he would be very sorry, and that he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions, which was well worth the having, and

could not be lost without sincere regret. Though it would be a cool, business-like, gentlemanly, self-possessed regret, no doubt.

His meditations on the subject were soon interrupted, first by the rustling of garments on the staircase, and then by the sudden whisking into the room of a lady rather past the middle age than otherwise, but dressed in a very juvenile manner, particularly as to the tightness of her bodice, who, running up to him with a kind of screw in her face and carriage, expressive of suppressed emotion, flung her arms round his neck, and said in a choking voice,

"My dear Paul! He's quite a Dombey!"

"Well, well!" returned her brother—for Mr. Dombey was her brother—"I think he is like the family. Don't agitate yourself, Louisa."

"It's very foolish of me," said Louisa, sitting down, and taking out her pocket-handkerchief, "but he's—he's such a perfect Dombey! I never saw anything like it in my life!"

"But what is this about Fanny herself?" said Mr. Dombey. "How is Fanny?"

"My dear Paul," returned Louisa, "it's nothing whatever. Take my word, it's nothing whatever. There is exhaustion, certainly, but nothing like what I underwent myself, either with George or Frederick. An effort is necessary. That's all. If dear Fanny were a Dombey!—But I dare say she'll make it; I have no doubt she'll make it. Knowing it to be required of her as a duty, of course she'll make it. My dear Paul, it's very weak and silly of me, I know, to be so trembly and shaky from head to foot; but I am so very queer that I must ask you for a glass of wine and a morsel of that cake. I thought I should have fallen out of the staircase window as I came down from seeing dear Fanny, and that tidy ickle sing." These last words originated in a sudden vivid reminiscence of the baby.

They were succeeded by a gentle tap at the door.

"Mrs. Chick," said a very bland female voice outside, "how are you now, my dear friend?"

"My dear Paul," said Louisa in a low voice as she rose from her seat, "it's Miss Tox. The kindest creature! I never could have got here without her! Miss Tox, my brother, Mr. Dombey. Paul, my dear, my very particular friend Miss Tox."

The lady thus specially presented was a long, lean figure, wearing such a faded air that she seemed not to have been made in what linendrapers call "fast colours" originally, and to have, by little and little, washed out. But for this,

she might have been described as the very pink of general propitiation and politeness. From a long habit of listening admirably to everything that was said in her presence, and looking at the speakers as if she were mentally engaged in taking off impressions of their images upon her soul, never to part with the same but with life, her head had quite settled on one side. Her hands had contracted a spasmodic habit of raising themselves of their own accord as in involuntary admiration. Her eyes were liable to a similar affection. She had the softest voice that ever was heard; and her nose, stupendously aquiline, had a little knob in the very centre or keystone of the bridge, whence it tended downwards towards her face, as in an invincible determination never to turn up at anything.

Miss Tox's dress, though perfectly genteel and good, had a certain character of angularity and scantiness: She was accustomed to wear odd weedy little flowers in her bonnets and caps. Strange grasses were sometimes perceived in her hair; and it was observed by the curious, of all her collars, frills, tuckers, wristbands, and other gossamer articles—indeed, of everything she wore which had two ends to it intended to unite—that the two ends were never on good terms, and wouldn't quite meet without a struggle. She had furry articles for winter wear, as tippets, boas, and muffs, which stood up on end in a rampant manner, and were not at all sleek. She was much given to the carrying about of small bags with snaps to them, that went off like little pistols when they were shut up; and, when full dressed, she wore round her neck the barrenest of lockets, representing a fishy old eye, with no approach to speculation in it. These and other appearances of a similar nature had served to propagate the opinion, that Miss Tox was a lady of what is called a limited independence, which she turned to the best account. Possibly her mincing gait encouraged the belief, and suggested that her clipping a step of ordinary compass to two or three, originated in her habit of making the most of everything.

"I am sure," said Miss Tox, with a prodigious curtsy, "that to have the honour of being presented to Mr. Dombey is a distinction which I have long sought, but very little expected at the present moment. My dear Mrs. Chick—may I say Louisa?"

Mrs. Chick took Miss Tox's hand in hers, rested the foot of her wine-glass upon it, repressed a tear, and said in a low voice, "Bless you!"

"My dear Louisa, then," said Miss Tox, "my sweet friend, how are you now?"

"Better," Mrs. Chick returned. "Take some wine. You have been almost as anxious as I have been, and must want it, I am sure."

Mr. Dombey of course officiated.

"Miss Tox, Paul," pursued Mrs. Chick, still retaining her hand, "knowing how much I have been interested in the anticipation of the event of to-day, has been working at a little gift for Fanny, which I promised to present. It is only a pincushion for the toilet table, Paul; but I do say, and will say, and must say, that Miss Tox has very prettily adapted the sentiment to the occasion. I call 'Welcome, little Dombey,' poetry, myself!"

"Is that the device?" inquired her brother.

"That is the device," returned Louisa.

"But do me the justice to remember, my dear Louisa," said Miss Tox in a tone of low and earnest entreaty, "that nothing but the—I have some difficulty in expressing myself—the dubiousness of the result would have induced me to take so great a liberty. 'Welcome, Master Dombey,' would have been much more congenial to my feelings, as I am sure you know. But the uncertainty attendant on angelic strangers will, I hope, excuse what must otherwise appear an unwarrantable familiarity." Miss Tox made a graceful bend, as she spoke, in favour of Mr. Dombey, which that gentleman graciously acknowledged. Even the sort of recognition of Dombey and Son, conveyed in the foregoing conversation, was so palatable to him, that his sister, Mrs. Chick—though he affected to consider her a weak, good-natured person—had perhaps more influence over him than anybody else.

"Well!" said Mrs. Chick with a sweet smile, "after this, I forgive Fanny everything!"

It was a declaration in a Christian spirit, and Mrs. Chick felt that it did her good. Not that she had anything particular to forgive in her sister-in-law, nor, indeed, anything at all, except her having married her brother—in itself a species of audacity—and her having, in the course of events, given birth to a girl instead of a boy: which, as Mrs. Chick had frequently observed, was not quite what she had expected of her, and was not a pleasant return for all the attention and distinction she had met with.

Mr. Dombey being hastily summoned out of the room at this moment, the two ladies were left alone together. Miss Tox immediately became spasmodic.

"I knew you would admire my brother. I told you so beforehand, my dear," said Louisa.

Miss Tox's hands and eyes expressed how much.

"And as to his property, my dear!"

"Ah!" said Miss Tox with deep feeling.

"Im—mense!"

"But his deportment, my dear Louisa!" said Miss Tox. "His presence! His dignity! No portrait that I have ever seen of any one has been half so replete with those qualities. Something so stately, you know: so uncompromising: so very wide across the chest: so upright! A pecuniary Duke of York, my love, and nothing short of it!" said Miss Tox. "That's what I should designate him."

"Why, my dear Paul!" exclaimed his sister as he returned, "you look quite pale! There's nothing the matter?"

"I am sorry to say, Louisa, that they tell me that Fanny——"

"Now, my dear Paul," returned his sister, rising, "don't believe it. If you have any reliance on my experience, Paul, you may rest assured that there is nothing wanting but an effort on Fanny's part. And that effort," she continued, taking off her bonnet, and adjusting her cap and gloves, in a business-like manner, "she must be encouraged, and really, if necessary, urged to make. Now, my dear Paul, come up-stairs with me."

Mr. Dombey, who, besides being generally influenced by his sister for the reason already mentioned, had really faith in her as an experienced and bustling matron, acquiesced: and followed her, at once, to the sick chamber.

The lady lay upon her bed as he had left her, clasping her little daughter to her breast. The child clung close about her, with the same intensity as before, and never raised her head, or moved her soft cheek from her mother's face, or looked on those who stood around, or spoke, or moved, or shed a tear.

"Restless without the little girl," the Doctor whispered Mr. Dombey. "We found it best to have her in again."

There was such a solemn stillness round the bed; and the two medical attendants seemed to look on the impassive form with so much compassion and so little hope, that Mrs. Chick was for the moment diverted from her purpose. But presently summoning courage, and what she called presence of mind, she sat down by the bedside, and said in the low, precise tone of one who endeavours to awaken a sleeper:

"Fanny! Fanny!"

There was no sound in answer but the loud ticking of Mr. Dombey's watch and Doctor

Parker Peps's watch, which seemed in the silence to be running a race.

"Fanny, my dear," said Mrs. Chick with assumed lightness, "here's Mr. Dombey come to see you. Won't you speak to him? They want to lay your little boy—the baby, Fanny, you know; you have hardly seen him yet, I think—in bed; but they can't till you rouse yourself a little. Don't you think it's time you roused yourself a little? Eh?"

She bent her ear to the bed, and listened: at the same time looking round at the bystanders, and holding up her finger.

"Eh?" she repeated. "What was it you said, Fanny? I didn't hear you."

No word or sound in answer. Mr. Dombey's watch and Doctor Parker Peps's watch seemed to be racing faster.

"Now really, Fanny my dear," said the sister-in-law, altering her position, and speaking less confidently, and more earnestly, in spite of herself, "I shall have to be quite cross with you, if you don't rouse yourself. It's necessary for you to make an effort, and perhaps a very great and painful effort, which you are not disposed to make; but this is a world of effort you know, Fanny, and we must never yield, when so much depends upon us. Come! Try! I must really scold you if you don't!"

The race in the ensuing pause was fierce and furious. The watches seemed to jostle, and to trip each other up.

"Fanny!" said Louisa, glancing round, with a gathering alarm. "Only look at me. Only open your eyes to show me that you hear and understand me; will you? Good Heaven, gentlemen, what is to be done?"

The two medical attendants exchanged a look across the bed; and the physician, stooping down, whispered in the child's ear. Not having understood the purport of his whisper, the little creature turned her perfectly colourless face and deep dark eyes towards him; but without loosening her hold in the least.

The whisper was repeated.

"Mamma!" said the child.

The little voice, familiar and dearly loved, awakened some show of consciousness, even at that ebb. For a moment, the closed eyelids trembled, and the nostril quivered, and the faintest shadow of a smile was seen.

"Mamma!" cried the child, sobbing aloud.

"Oh, dear mamma! oh, dear mamma!"

The Doctor gently brushed the scattered ringlets of the child aside from the face and mouth of the mother. Alas, how calm they lay there; how little breath there was to stir them!

Thus, clinging fast to that slight spar within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH TIMELY PROVISION IS MADE FOR AN EMERGENCY THAT WILL SOMETIMES ARISE IN THE BEST-REGULATED FAMILIES.



SHALL never cease to congratulate myself," said Mrs. Chick, "on having said, when I little thought what was in store for us,—really as if I was inspired by something,—that I forgave poor dear Fanny everything.

Whatever happens, that must always be a comfort to me!"

Mrs. Chick made this impressive observation in the drawing-room, after having descended thither from the inspection of the mantua-makers up-stairs, who were busy on the family mourning. She delivered it for the behoof of Mr. Chick, who was a stout, bald gentleman, with a very large face, and his hands continually in his pockets, and who had a tendency in his nature to whistle and hum tunes, which, sensible of the indecorum of such sounds in a house of grief, he was at some pains to repress at present.

"Don't you over-exert yourself, Loo," said Mr. Chick, "or you'll be laid up with spasms, I see. Right tol loor-rul! Bless my soul, I forgot! We're here one day and gone the next!"

Mrs. Chick contented herself with a glance of reproof, and then proceeded with the thread of her discourse.

"I am sure," she said, "I hope this heart-rending occurrence will be a warning to all of us to accustom ourselves to rouse ourselves, and to make efforts in time where they're required of us. There's a moral in everything, if we would only avail ourselves of it. It will be our own faults if we lose sight of this one."

Mr. Chick invaded the grave silence which ensued on this remark with the singularly inappropriate air of "A cobbler there was;" and checking himself, in some confusion, observed that it was undoubtedly our own faults if we didn't improve such melancholy occasions as the present.

"Which might be better improved, I should think, Mr. C.," retorted his helpmate after a short pause, "than by the introduction either of the College Hornpipe, or the equally unmeaning and unfeeling remark of rump-te-iddity, bow-

wow-wow!"—which Mr. Chick had indeed indulged in, under his breath, and which Mrs. Chick repeated in a tone of withering scorn.

"Merely habit, my dear," pleaded Mr. Chick.

"Nonsense! Habit!" returned his wife.

"If you're a rational being, don't make such ridiculous excuses. Habit! If I was to get a habit (as you call it) of walking on the ceiling, like the flies, I should hear enough of it, I dare say."

It appeared so probable that such a habit might be attended with some degree of notoriety, that Mr. Chick didn't venture to dispute the position.

"How's the baby, Loo?" asked Mr. Chick: to change the subject.

"What baby do you mean?" answered Mrs. Chick. "I am sure the morning I have had with that dining-room down-stairs one mass of babies, no one in their senses would believe."

"One mass of babies!" repeated Mr. Chick, staring with an alarmed expression about him.

"It would have occurred to most men," said Mrs. Chick, "that poor dear Fanny being no more, it becomes necessary to provide a nurse."

"Oh! Ah!" said Mr. Chick. "Toor-rul—such is life, I mean. I hope you are suited, my dear."

"Indeed I am not," said Mrs. Chick; "nor likely to be, so far as I can see. Meanwhile, of course, the child is—"

"Going to the very deuce," said Mr. Chick thoughtfully, "to be sure."

Admonished, however, that he had committed himself, by the indignation expressed in Mrs. Chick's countenance at the idea of a Dombey going there; and thinking to atone for his misconduct by a bright suggestion, he added:

"Couldn't something temporary be done with a teapot?"

If he had meant to bring the subject prematurely to a close, he could not have done it more effectually. After looking at him for some moments in silent resignation, Mrs. Chick walked majestically to the window and peeped through the blind, attracted by the sound of wheels. Mr. Chick, finding that his destiny was, for the time, against him, said no more, and walked off. But it was not always thus with Mr. Chick. He was often in the ascendant himself, and at those times punished Louisa roundly. In their matrimonial bickerings they were, upon the whole, a well-matched, fairly-balanced, give-and-take couple. It would have been, generally speaking, very difficult to have betted on the winner. Often, when Mr. Chick seemed beaten, he would suddenly make a start, turn the tables, clatter

them about the ears of Mrs. Chick, and carry all before him. Being liable himself to similar unlooked-for checks from Mrs. Chick, their little contests usually possessed a character of uncertainty that was very animating.

Miss Tox had arrived on the wheels just now alluded to, and came running into the room in a breathless condition.

"My dear Louisa," said Miss Tox, "is the vacancy still unsupplied?"

"You good soul, yes," said Mrs. Chick.

"Then, my dear Louisa," returned Miss Tox, "I hope and believe— But in one moment, my dear, I'll introduce the party."

Running down-stairs again as fast as she had run up, Miss Tox got the party out of the hackney coach, and soon returned with it under convoy.

It then appeared that she had used the word, not in its legal or business acceptation, when it merely expresses an individual, but as a noun of multitude, or signifying many; for Miss Tox escorted a plump, rosy-cheeked, wholesome, apple-faced young woman, with an infant in her arms; a younger woman not so plump, but apple-faced also, who led a plump and apple-faced child in each hand; another plump and also apple-faced boy, who walked by himself; and finally, a plump and apple-faced man, who carried in his arms another plump and apple-faced boy, whom he stood down on the floor, and admonished, in a husky whisper, to "kitch hold of his brother Johnny."

"My dear Louisa," said Miss Tox, "knowing your great anxiety, and wishing to relieve it, I posted off myself to the Queen Charlotte's Royal Married Females, which you had forgot, and put the question, Was there anybody there that they thought would suit? No, they said, there was not. When they gave me that answer, I do assure you, my dear, I was almost driven to despair on your account. But it did so happen that one of the Royal Married Females, hearing the inquiry, reminded the matron of another who had gone to her own home, and who, she said, would in all likelihood be most satisfactory. The moment I heard this, and had it corroborated by the matron—excellent references and unimpeachable character—I got the address, my dear, and posted off again."

"Like the dear good Tox you are!" said Louisa.

"Not at all," returned Miss Tox. "Don't say so. Arriving at the house (the cleanest place, my dear! You might eat your dinner off the floor), I found the whole family sitting at table; and feeling that no account of them

could be half so comfortable to you and Mr. Dombey, as the sight of them all together, I brought them all away. This gentleman," said Miss Tox, pointing out the apple-faced man, "is the father. Will you have the goodness to come a little forward, sir?"

The apple-faced man, having sheepishly complied with this request, stood chuckling and grinning in a front row.

"This is his wife, of course," said Miss Tox, singling out the young woman with the baby. "How do you do, Polly?"

"I'm pretty well, I thank you, ma'am," said Polly.

By way of bringing her out dexterously, Miss Tox had made the inquiry as in condescension to an old acquaintance, whom she hadn't seen for a fortnight or so.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Miss Tox. "The other young woman is her unmarried sister, who lives with them, and would take care of her children. Her name's *Jemima*. How do you do, *Jemima*?"

"I'm pretty well, I thank you, ma'am," returned *Jemima*.

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Miss Tox. "I hope you'll keep so. Five children. Youngest six weeks. The fine little boy with the blister on his nose is the eldest. The blister, I believe," said Miss Tox, looking round upon the family, "is not constitutional, but accidental?"

The apple-faced man was understood to growl, "Flat-iron."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Miss Tox, "did you—"

"Flat-iron," he repeated.

"Oh yes!" said Miss Tox. "Yes! quite true. I forgot. The little creature, in his mother's absence, smelt a warm flat-iron. You're quite right, sir. You were going to have the goodness to inform me, when we arrived at the door, that you were by trade a——"

"Stoker," said the man.

"A choker!" said Miss Tox, quite aghast.

"Stoker," said the man. "Steam-engine."

"Oh-h! Yes!" returned Miss Tox, looking thoughtfully at him, and seeming still to have but a very imperfect understanding of his meaning.

"And how do you like it, sir?"

"Which, mum?" said the man.

"That," replied Miss Tox. "Your trade."

"Oh! Pretty well, mum. The ashes sometimes gets in here," touching his chest: "and makes a man speak gruff, as at the present time. But it *is* ashes, mum, not crustiness."

Miss Tox seemed to be so little enlightened by this reply as to find a difficulty in pursuing the subject. But Mrs. Chick relieved her by entering into a close private examination of Polly, her children, her marriage certificate, testimonials, and so forth. Polly coming out unscathed from this ordeal, Mrs. Chick withdrew with her report to her brother's room, and as an emphatic comment on it, and corroboration of it, carried the two rosiest little Toodles with her, Toodle being the family name of the apple-faced family.

Mr. Dombey had remained in his own apartment since the death of his wife, absorbed in visions of the youth, education, and destination of his baby son. Something lay at the bottom of his cool heart, colder and heavier than its ordinary load; but it was more a sense of the child's loss than his own, awakening within him an almost angry sorrow. That the life and progress on which he built such hopes should be endangered in the outset by so mean a want; that Dombey and Son should be tottering for a nurse, was a sore humiliation. And yet, in his pride and jealousy, he viewed with so much bitterness the thought of being dependent, for the very first step towards the accomplishment of his soul's desire, on a hired serving-woman, who would be to the child, for the time, all that even *his* alliance could have made his own wife, that in every new rejection of a candidate he felt a secret pleasure. The time had now come, however, when he could no longer be divided between those two sets of feelings. The less so, as there seemed to be no flaw in the title of Polly Toodle after his sister had set it forth, with many commendations on the indefatigable friendship of Miss Tox.

"These children look healthy," said Mr. Dombey. "But to think of their some day claiming a sort of relationship to Paul! Take them away, Louisa! Let me see this woman and her husband."

Mrs. Chick bore off the tender pair of Toodles, and presently returned with that tougher couple whose presence her brother had commanded.

"My good woman," said Mr. Dombey, turning round in his easy-chair as one piece, and not as a man with limbs and joints, "I understand you are poor, and wish to earn money by nursing the little boy, my son, who has been so prematurely deprived of what can never be replaced. I have no objection to your adding to the comforts of your family by that means. So far as I can tell, you seem to be a deserving object. But I must impose one or two conditions on you before you enter my house in that

capacity. While you are here, I must stipulate that you are always known as—say as Richards—an ordinary name and convenient. Have you any objection to be known as Richards? You had better consult your husband."

As the husband did nothing but chuckle and grin, and continually draw his right hand across his mouth, moistening the palm, Mrs. Toodle, after nudging him twice or thrice in vain, dropped a curtsy and replied, "that perhaps, if she was to be called out of her name, it would be considered in the wages."

"Oh, of course," said Mr. Dombey. "I desire to make it a question of wages altogether. Now, Richards, if you nurse my bereaved child, I wish you to remember this always. You will receive a liberal stipend in return for the discharge of certain duties, in the performance of which I wish you to see as little of your family as possible. When those duties cease to be required and rendered, and the stipend ceases to be paid, there is an end of all relations between us. Do you understand me?"

Mrs. Toodle seemed doubtful about it; and as to Toodle himself, he had evidently no doubt whatever that he was all abroad.

"You have children of your own," said Mr. Dombey. "It is not at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you. I don't expect or desire anything of the kind. Quite the reverse. When you go away from here, you will have concluded what is a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting: and will stay away. The child will cease to remember you; and you will cease, if you please, to remember the child."

Mrs. Toodle, with a little more colour in her cheeks than she had had before, said "she hoped she knew her place."

"I hope you do, Richards," said Mr. Dombey. "I have no doubt you know it very well. Indeed, it is so plain and obvious that it could hardly be otherwise. Louisa, my dear, arrange with Richards about money, and let her have it when and how she pleases. Mr. What's-your-name, a word with you, if you please!"

Thus arrested on the threshold as he was following his wife out of the room, Toodle returned and confronted Mr. Dombey alone. He was a strong, loose, round-shouldered, shuffling, shaggy fellow, on whom his clothes sat negligently: with a good deal of hair and whisker, deepened in its natural tint, perhaps, by smoke and coal-dust: hard, knotty hands: and a square forehead, as coarse in grain as the bark of an oak. A thorough contrast in all respects to Mr.

Dombey, who was one of those close-shaved, close-cut, moneyed gentlemen who are glossy and crisp like new bank notes, and who seem to be artificially braced and tightened as by the stimulating action of golden shower-baths.

"You have a son, I believe?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Four on 'em, sir. Four hims and a her. All alive!"

"Why, it's as much as you can afford to keep them!" said Mr. Dombey.

"I couldn't hardly afford but one thing in the world less, sir."

"What is that?"

"To lose 'em, sir."

"Can you read?" asked Mr. Dombey.

"Why, not partickler, sir,"

"Write?"

"With chalk, sir."

"With anything?"

"I could make shift to chalk a little bit, I think, if I was put to it," said Toodle after some reflection.

"And yet," said Mr. Dombey, "you are two or three and thirty, I suppose?"

"Thereabouts, I suppose, sir," answered Toodle after more reflection.

"Then why don't you learn?" asked Mr. Dombey.

"So I'm a-going to, sir. One of my little boys is a-going to learn me, when he's old enough, and been to school himself."

"Well!" said Mr. Dombey after looking at him attentively, and with no great favour, as he stood gazing round the room (principally round the ceiling), and still drawing his hand across and across his mouth. "You heard what I said to your wife just now."

"Polly heard it," said Toodle, jerking his hat over his shoulder in the direction of the door, with an air of perfect confidence in his better half. "It's all right."

"As you appear to leave everything to her," said Mr. Dombey, frustrated in his intention of impressing his views still more distinctly on the husband, as the stronger character, "I suppose it is of no use my saying anything to you."

"Not a bit," said Toodle. "Polly heard it. *She's* awake, sir."

"I won't detain you any longer, then," returned Mr. Dombey, disappointed. "Where have you worked all your life?"

"Mostly underground, sir, till I got married. I come to the level then. I'm a-going on one of these here railroads when they comes into full play."

As the last straw breaks the laden camel's

back, this piece of underground information crushed the sinking spirits of Mr. Dombey. He motioned his child's foster-father to the door, who departed by no means unwillingly: and then, turning the key, paced up and down the room in solitary wretchedness. For all his starched impenetrable dignity and composure, he wiped blinding tears from his eyes as he did so: and often said, with an emotion of which he would not, for the world, have had a witness, "Poor little fellow!"

It may have been characteristic of Mr. Dombey's pride that he pitied himself through the child. Not poor me. Not poor widower, confiding by constraint in the wife of an ignorant Hind who has been working "mostly underground" all his life, and yet at whose door Death has never knocked, and at whose poor table four sons daily sit—but poor little fellow!

Those words being on his lips, it occurred to him—and it is an instance of the strong attraction with which his hopes and fears and all his thoughts were tending to one centre—that a great temptation was being placed in this woman's way. Her infant was a boy too. Now, would it be possible for her to change them?

Though he was soon satisfied that he had dismissed the idea as romantic and unlikely—though possible, there was no denying—he could not help pursuing it so far as to entertain within himself a picture of what his condition would be, if he should discover such an imposture when he was grown old. Whether a man so situated would be able to pluck away the result of so many years of usage, confidence, and belief from the imposture, and endow a stranger with it?

As his unusual emotion subsided, these misgivings gradually melted away, though so much of their shadow remained behind, that he was constant in his resolution to look closely after Richards himself, without appearing to do so. Being now in an easier frame of mind, he regarded the woman's station as rather an advantageous circumstance than otherwise, by placing, in itself, a broad distance between her and the child, and rendering their separation easy and natural.

Meanwhile, terms were ratified and agreed upon between Mrs. Chick and Richards, with the assistance of Miss Tox; and Richards being with much ceremony invested with the Dombey baby, as if it were an Order, resigned her own, with many tears and kisses, to *Jemima*. Glasses of wine were then produced, to sustain the drooping spirits of the family.

"You'll take a glass yourself, sir, won't you?" said Miss Tox as Toodle appeared.

"Thankee, mum," said Toodle, "since you are suppressing."

"And you're very glad to leave your dear good wife in such a comfortable home, ain't you, sir?" said Miss Tox, nodding and winking at him stealthily.

"No, mum," said Toodle. "Here's wishing of her back agin."

Polly cried more than ever at this. So Mrs. Chick, who had her matronly apprehensions that this indulgence in grief might be prejudicial to the little Dombey ("acid, indeed," she whispered Miss Tox), hastened to the rescue.

"Your little child will thrive charmingly with your sister *Jemima*, Richards," said Mrs. Chick; "and you have only to make an effort—this is a world of effort, you know, Richards—to be very happy indeed. You have been already measured for your mourning, haven't you, Richards?"

"Ye—es, ma'am," sobbed Polly.

"And it'll fit beautifully, I know," said Mrs. Chick, "for the same young person has made me many dresses. The very best materials, too!"

"Lor, you'll be so smart," said Miss Tox, "that your husband won't know you; will you, sir?"

"I should know her," said Toodle gruffly, "anyhow and anywhere."

Toodle was evidently not to be bought over.

"As to living, Richards, you know," pursued Mrs. Chick, "why, the very best of everything will be at your disposal. You will order your little dinner every day; and anything you take a fancy to, I'm sure will be as readily provided as if you were a lady."

"Yes, to be sure!" said Miss Tox, keeping up the ball with great sympathy. "And as to porter!—quite unlimited, will it not, Louisa?"

"Oh, certainly!" returned Mrs. Chick in the same tone. "With a little abstinence, you know, my dear, in point of vegetables."

"And pickles, perhaps," suggested Miss Tox.

"With such exceptions," said Louisa, "she'll consult her choice entirely, and be under no restraint at all, my love."

"And then, of course, you know," said Miss Tox, "however fond she is of her own dear little child—and I'm sure, Louisa, you don't blame her for being fond of it?"

"Oh no!" cried Mrs. Chick benignantly.

"Still," resumed Miss Tox, "she naturally must be interested in her young charge, and must consider it a privilege to see a little cherub, closely connected with the superior classes, gra-

dually unfolding itself from day to day at one common fountain. Is it not so, Louisa?"

"Most undoubtedly!" said Mrs. Chick. "You see, my love, she's already quite contented and comfortable, and means to say good-bye to her sister *Jemima* and her little pets, and her good honest husband, with a light heart and a smile; don't she, my dear?"

"Oh yes!" cried Miss Tox. "To be sure she does!"

Notwithstanding which, however, poor *Polly* embraced them all round in great distress, and finally ran away to avoid any more particular leave-taking between herself and the children. But the stratagem hardly succeeded as well as it deserved; for the smallest boy but one, divining her intent, immediately began swarming upstairs after her—if that word of doubtful etymology be admissible—on his arms and legs; while the eldest (known in the family by the name of *Biler*, in remembrance of the steam-engine) beat a demoniacal tattoo with his boots, expressive of grief; in which he was joined by the rest of the family.

A quantity of oranges and halfpence, thrust indiscriminately on each young *Toodle*, checked the first violence of their regret, and the family were speedily transported to their own home, by means of the hackney coach kept in waiting for that purpose. The children, under the guardianship of *Jemima*, blocked up the window, and dropped out oranges and halfpence all the way along. Mr. *Toodle* himself preferred to ride behind among the spikes, as being the mode of conveyance to which he was best accustomed.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MR. DOMBEY, AS A MAN AND A FATHER, IS SEEN AT THE HEAD OF THE HOME DEPARTMENT.

THE funeral of the deceased lady having been "performed" to the entire satisfaction of the undertaker, as well as of the neighbourhood at large; which is generally disposed to be captious on such a point, and is prone to take offence at any omissions or shortcomings in the ceremonies, the various members of Mr. Dombey's household subsided into their several places in the domestic system. That small world, like the great one out of doors, had the capacity of easily forgetting its dead; and when the cook had said she was a

quiet-tempered lady, and the housekeeper had said it was the common lot, and the butler had said who'd have thought it? and the housemaid had said she couldn't hardly believe it, and the footman had said it seemed exactly like a dream, they had quite-worn the subject out, and began to think their mourning was wearing rusty too.

On *Richards*, who was established up-stairs in a state of honourable captivity, the dawn of her new life seemed to break cold and grey. Mr. Dombey's house was a large one, on the shady side of a tall, dark, dreadfully genteel street in the region between *Portland Place* and *Bryanstone Square*. It was a corner house, with great wide areas containing cellars frowned upon by barred windows, and leered at by crooked-eyed doors leading to dust-bins. It was a house of dismal state, with a circular back to it, containing a whole suite of drawing-rooms looking upon a gravelled yard, where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled rather than rustled, their leaves were so smoke-dried. The summer sun was never on the street but in the morning about breakfast-time, when it came with the water-carts and the old-clothes men, and the people with geraniums, and the umbrella-mender, and the man who trilled the little bell of the Dutch clock as he went along. It was soon gone again, to return no more that day; and the bands of music, and the straggling *Punch's* shows going after it, left it a prey to the most dismal of organs, and white mice; with now and then a porcupine, to vary the entertainments; until the butlers whose families were dining out began to stand at the house-doors in the twilight, and the lamp-lighter made his nightly failure in attempting to brighten up the street with gas.

It was as black a house inside as outside. When the funeral was over, Mr. Dombey ordered the furniture to be covered up—perhaps to preserve it for the son with whom his plans were all associated—and the rooms to be ungarnished, saving such as he retained for himself on the ground-floor. Accordingly, mysterious shapes were made of tables and chairs heaped together in the middle of rooms, and covered over with great winding-sheets. Bell-handles, window blinds, and looking-glasses being papered up in journals, daily and weekly, obtruded fragmentary accounts of deaths and dreadful murders. Every chandelier or lustre, muffled in holland, looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling's eye. Odours, as from vaults and damp places, came out of the chimneys. The dead-and-buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages. Every gust of wind

that rose brought eddying round the corner, from the neighbouring mews, some fragments of the straw that had been strewn before the house when she was ill, mildewed remains of which were still cleaving to the neighbourhood; and these, being always drawn by some invisible attraction to the threshold of the dirty house to let immediately opposite, addressed a dismal eloquence to Mr. Dombey's windows.

The apartments which Mr. Dombey reserved for his own inhabiting were attainable from the hall, and consisted of a sitting-room; a library, which was, in fact, a dressing-room, so that the smell of hot-pressed paper, vellum, morocco, and Russia leather contended in it with the smell of divers pairs of boots; and a kind of conservatory, or little glass breakfast-room beyond, commanding a prospect of the trees before mentioned, and, generally speaking, of a few prowling cats. These three rooms opened upon one another. In the morning, when Mr. Dombey was at his breakfast in one or other of the two first mentioned of them, as well as in the afternoon when he came home to dinner, a bell was rung for Richards to repair to this glass chamber, and there walk to and fro with her young charge. From the glimpses she caught of Mr. Dombey at these times, sitting in the dark distance, looking out towards the infant from among the dark heavy furniture—the house had been inhabited for years by his father, and in many of its appointments was old-fashioned and grim—she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood.

Little Paul Dombey's foster-mother had led this life, herself, and had carried little Paul through it, for some weeks; and had returned up-stairs one day from a melancholy saunter through the dreary rooms of state (she never went out without Mrs. Chick, who called on fine mornings, usually accompanied by Miss Tox, to take her and Baby for an airing—or, in other words, to march them gravely up and down the pavement: like a walking funeral); when, as she was sitting in her own room, the door was slowly and quietly opened, and a dark-eyed little girl looked in.

"It's Miss Florence come home from her aunt's, no doubt," thought Richards, who had never seen the child before. "Hope I see you well, miss."

"Is that my brother?" asked the child, pointing to the baby.

"Yes, my pretty," answered Richards. "Come and kiss him."

But the child, instead of advancing, looked her earnestly in the face, and said:

"What have you done with my mamma?"

"Lord bless the little creter!" cried Richards, "what a sad question! I done? Nothing, miss."

"What have *they* done with my mamma?" inquired the child.

"I never saw such a melting thing in all my life!" said Richards, who naturally substituted for this child one of her own, inquiring for herself intlike circumstances. "Come nearer here, my dear miss! Don't be afraid of me."

"I am not afraid of you," said the child, drawing nearer. "But I want to know what they have done with my mamma."

"My darling," said Richards, "you wear that pretty black frock in remembrance of your mamma."

"I can remember my mamma," returned the child, with tears springing to her eyes, "in any frock."

"But people put on black to remember people when they're gone."

"Where gone?" asked the child.

"Come and sit down by me," said Richards, "and I'll tell you a story."

With a quick perception that it was intended to relate to what she had asked, little Florence laid aside the bonnet she had held in her hand until now, and sat down on a stool at the nurse's feet, looking up into her face.

"Once upon a time," said Richards, "there was a lady—a very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her."

"A very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her," repeated the child.

"Who, when God thought it right that it should be so, was taken ill and died."

The child shuddered.

"Died, never to be seen again by any one on earth, and was buried in the ground where the trees grow."

"The cold ground," said the child, shuddering again.

"No! The warm ground," returned Polly, seizing her advantage, "where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and corn, and I don't know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to Heaven!"

The child, who had drooped her head, raised it again, and sat looking at her intently.

"So; let me see," said Polly, not a little flurried between this earnest scrutiny, her desire to comfort the child, her sudden success, and her very slight confidence in her own powers.

"So, when this lady died, wherever they took her, or wherever they put her, she went to God! and she prayed to Him, this lady did," said Polly, affecting herself beyond measure, being heartily in earnest, "to teach her little daughter to be sure of that in her heart: and to know that she was happy there, and loved her still: and to hope and try—oh, all her life—to meet her there one day, never, never, never to part any more."

"It was my mamma!" exclaimed the child, springing up, and clasping her round the neck.

"And the child's heart," said Polly, drawing her to her breast: "the little daughter's heart was so full of the truth of this, that even when she heard it from a strange nurse that couldn't tell it right, but was a poor mother herself, and that was all, she found a comfort in it—didn't feel so lonely—sobbed and cried upon her bosom—took kindly to the baby lying in her lap—and—there, there!" said Polly, smoothing the child's curls, and dropping tears upon them. "There, poor dear!"

"Oh well, Miss Floy! And won't your pa be angry neither!" cried a quick voice at the door, proceeding from a short, brown, womanly girl of fourteen, with a little snub nose and black eyes like jet beads. "When it was 'tickerlerly given out that you wasn't to go and worrit the wet-nurse."

"She don't worry me," was the surprised rejoinder of Polly. "I am very fond of children."

"Oh! but begging your pardon, Mrs. Richards, that don't matter you know," returned the black-eyed girl, who was so desperately sharp and biting that she seemed to make one's eyes water. "I may be very fond of pennywinkles, Mrs. Richards, but it don't follow that I'm to have 'em for tea."

"Well, it don't matter," said Polly.

"Oh, thankse, Mrs. Richards, don't it!" returned the sharp girl. "Remembering, however, if you'll be so good, that Miss Floy's under my charge, and Master Paul's under your'n."

"But still we needn't quarrel," said Polly.

"Oh no, Mrs. Richards," rejoined Spitfire. "Not at all, I don't wish it, we needn't stand upon that footing, Miss Floy being a permanency, Master Paul a temporary." Spitfire made use of none but comma pauses; shooting out whatever she had to say in one sentence, and in one breath, if possible.

"Miss Florence has just come home, hasn't she?" asked Polly.

"Yes, Mrs. Richards, just come home; and here, Miss Floy, before you've been in the house a quarter of an hour, you go a smearing your

wet face against the expensive mourning that Mrs. Richards is a wearing for your ma!" With this remonstrance, young Spitfire, whose real name was Susan Nipper, detached the child from her new friend by a wrench—as if she were a tooth. But she seemed to do it more in the excessively sharp exercise of her official functions than with any deliberate unkindness.

"She'll be quite happy, now she has come home again," said Polly, nodding to her with an encouraging smile upon her wholesome face, "and will be so pleased to see her dear papa to-night."

"Lork, Mrs. Richards!" cried Miss Nipper, taking up her words with a jerk. "Don't. See her dear papa, indeed! I should like to see her do it!"

"Won't she, then?" asked Polly.

"Lork, Mrs. Richards, no, her pa's a deal too wrapped up in somebody else, and before there was a somebody else to be wrapped up in she never was a favourite, girls are thrown away in this house, Mrs. Richards, I assure you."

The child looked quickly from one nurse to the other, as if she understood and felt what was said.

"You surprise me!" cried Polly. "Hasn't Mr. Dombey seen her since——"

"No," interrupted Susan Nipper. "Not once since, and he hadn't hardly set his eyes upon her before that for months and months, and I don't think he'd have known her for his own child if he had met her in the streets, or would know her for his own child if he was to meet her in the streets to-morrow, Mrs. Richards, as to me," said Spitfire with a giggle, "I doubt if he's awere of my existence."

"Pretty dear!" said Richards; meaning, not Miss Nipper, but the little Florence.

"Oh! there's a Tartar within a hundred miles of where we're now in conversation, I can tell you, Mrs. Richards, present company always excepted too," said Susan Nipper; "wish you good morning, Mrs. Richards, now Miss Floy, you come along with me, and don't go hanging back like a naughty wicked child that judgments is no example to, don't."

In spite of being thus adjured, and in spite also of some hauling on the part of Susan Nipper, tending towards the dislocation of her right shoulder, little Florence broke away, and kissed her new friend affectionately.

"Good-bye!" said the child. "God bless you! I shall come to see you again soon, and you'll come to see me? Susan will let us. Won't you, Susan?"

Spitfire seemed to be in the main a good-

natured little body, although a disciple of that school of trainers of the young idea which holds that childhood, like money, must be shaken and rattled and jostled about a good deal to keep it bright. For, being thus appealed to with some endearing gestures and caresses, she folded her small arms and shook her head, and conveyed a relenting expression into her very wide-open black eyes.

"It ain't right of you to ask it, Miss Floy, for you know I can't refuse you, but Mrs. Richards and me will see what can be done, if Mrs. Richards likes, I may wish, you see, to take a voyage to Chaney, Mrs. Richards, but I mayn't know how to leave the London Docks."

Richards assented to the proposition.

"This house ain't so exactly ringing with merry-making," said Miss Nipper, "that one need be lonelier than one must be. Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out my two front double teeth, Mrs. Richards, but that's no reason why I need offer 'em the whole set."

This proposition was also assented to by Richards, as an obvious one.

"So I'm agreeable, I'm sure," said Susan Nipper, "to live friendly, Mrs. Richards, while Master Paul continues a permanency, if the means can be planned out without going openly against orders, but goodness gracious me, Miss Floy, you haven't got your things off yet, you naughty child, you haven't, come along."

With these words, Susan Nipper, in a transport of coercion, made a charge at her young ward, and swept her out of the room.

The child, in her grief and neglect, was so gentle, so quiet, and uncomplaining; was possessed of so much affection that no one seemed to care to have, and so much sorrowful intelligence that no one seemed to mind or think about the wounding of; that Polly's heart was sore when she was left alone again. In the simple passage that had taken place between herself and the motherless little girl, her own motherly heart had been touched no less than the child's; and she felt, as the child did, that there was something of confidence and interest between them from that moment.

Notwithstanding Mr. Toodle's great reliance on Polly, she was perhaps, in point of artificial accomplishments, very little his superior. But she was a good plain sample of a nature that is ever, in the mass, better, truer, higher, nobler, quicker to feel, and much more constant to retain, all tenderness and pity, self-denial and devotion, than the nature of men. And, perhaps, unlearned as she was, she could have brought a dawning knowledge home to Mr.

Dombey at that early day, which would not then have struck him in the end like lightning.

But this is from the purpose. Polly only thought, at that time, of improving on her successful propitiation of Miss Nipper, and devising some means of having little Florence beside her lawfully, and without rebellion. An opening happened to present itself that very night.

She had been rung down into the glass room as usual, and had walked about and about it a long time, with the baby in her arms, when, to her great surprise and dismay, Mr. Dombey came out suddenly, and stopped before her.

"Good evening, Richards."

Just the same austere, stiff gentleman as he had appeared to her on that first day. Such a hard-looking gentleman, that she involuntarily dropped her eyes and her curtsy at the same time.

"How is Master Paul, Richards?"

"Quite thriving, sir, and well."

"He looks so," said Mr. Dombey, glancing with great interest at the tiny face she uncovered for his observation, and yet affecting to be half careless of it. "They give you everything you want, I hope?"

"Oh yes, thank you, sir."

She suddenly appended such an obvious hesitation to this reply, however, that Mr. Dombey, who had turned away, stopped, and turned round again, inquiringly.

"I believe nothing is so good for making children lively and cheerful, sir, as seeing other children playing about 'em," observed Polly, taking courage.

"I think I mentioned to you, Richards, when you came here," said Mr. Dombey with a frown, "that I wished you to see as little of your family as possible. You can continue your walk if you please."

With that he disappeared into his inner room; and Polly had the satisfaction of feeling that he had thoroughly misunderstood her object, and that she had fallen into disgrace without the least advancement of her purpose.

Next night she found him walking about the conservatory when she came down. As she stopped at the door, checked by this unusual sight, and uncertain whether to advance or retreat, he called her in.

"If you really think that sort of society is good for the child," he said sharply, as if there had been no interval since she proposed it, "where's Miss Florence?"

"Nothing could be better than Miss Florence, sir," said Polly eagerly, "but I understood from her little maid that they were not to—"

Mr. Dombey rang the bell, and walked till it was answered.

"Tell them always to let Miss Florence be with Richards when she chooses, and go out with her, and so forth. Tell them to let the children be together when Richards wishes it."

The iron was now hot, and Richards striking on it boldly—it was a good cause, and she was bold in it, though instinctively afraid of Mr. Dombey—requested that Miss Florence might be sent down then and there, to make friends with her little brother.

She feigned to be dandling the child as the servant retired on this errand, but she thought she saw that Mr. Dombey's colour changed; that the expression of his face quite altered; that he turned hurriedly, as if to gainsay what he had said, or she had said, or both, and was only deterred by very shame.

And she was right. The last time he had seen his slighted child, there had been that in the sad embrace between her and her dying mother which was at once a revelation and a reproach to him. Let him be absorbed as he would in the Son on whom he built such high hopes, he could not forget that closing scene. He could not forget that he had had no part in it: That, at the bottom of its clear depths of tenderness and truth, lay those two figures clasped in each other's arms, while he stood on the bank above them, looking down a mere spectator—not a sharer with them—quite shut out.

Unable to exclude these things from his remembrance, or to keep his mind free from such imperfect shapes of the meaning with which they were fraught as were able to make themselves visible to him through the mist of his pride, his previous feelings of indifference towards little Florence changed into an uneasiness of an extraordinary kind. He almost felt as if she watched and distrusted him: As if she held the clue to something secret in his breast, of the nature of which he was hardly informed himself. As if she had an innate knowledge of one jarring and discordant string within him, and her very breath could sound it.

His feeling about the child had been negative from her birth. He had never conceived an aversion to her; it had not been worth his while or in his humour. She had never been a positively disagreeable object to him. But now he was ill at ease about her. She troubled his peace. He would have preferred to put her idea aside altogether, if he had known how. Perhaps—who shall decide on such mysteries?—he was afraid that he might come to hate her.

When little Florence timidly presented herself, Mr. Dombey stopped in his pacing up and down, and looked towards her. Had he looked with greater interest, and with a father's eye, he might have read in her keen glance the impulses and fears that made her waver; the passionate desire to run clinging to him, crying, as she hid her face in his embrace, "Oh, father, try to love me! there's no one else!" the dread of a repulse; the fear of being too bold, and of offending him; the pitiable need in which she stood of some assurance and encouragement; and how her overcharged young heart was wandering to find some natural resting-place for its sorrow and affection.

But he saw nothing of this. He saw her pause irresolutely at the door, and look towards him; and he saw no more.

"Come in," he said, "come in: what is the child afraid of?"

She came in; and, after glancing round her for a moment with an uncertain air, stood pressing her small hands hard together, close within the door.

"Come here, Florence," said her father coldly. "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, papa."

"Have you nothing to say to me?"

The tears that stood in her eyes, as she raised them quickly to his face, were frozen by the expression it wore. She looked down again, and put out her trembling hand.

Mr. Dombey took it loosely in his own, and stood looking down upon her for a moment as if he knew as little as the child what to say or do.

"There! Be a good girl," he said, patting her on the head, and regarding her as it were by stealth with a disturbed and doubtful look. "Go to Richards! Go!"

His little daughter hesitated for another instant, as though she would have clung about him still, or had some lingering hope that he might raise her in his arms and kiss her. She looked up in his face once more. He thought how like her expression was then to what it had been when she looked round at the doctor—that night—and instinctively dropped her hand and turned away.

It was not difficult to perceive that Florence was at a great disadvantage in her father's presence. It was not only a constraint upon the child's mind, but even upon the natural grace and freedom of her actions. Still Polly persevered with all the better heart for seeing this; and, judging of Mr. Dombey by herself, had great confidence in the mute appeal of poor little

Florence's mourning dress. "It's hard indeed," thought Polly, "if he takes only to one little motherless child, when he has another, and that a girl, before his eyes."

So, Polly kept her before his eyes as long as she could, and managed so well with little Paul

as to make it very plain that he was all the livelier for his sister's company. When it was time to withdraw up-stairs again, she would have sent Florence into the inner room to say good night to her father, but the child was timid and drew back; and when she urged her again,



"I MAY BE VERY FOND OF PENNYWINKLES, MRS. RICHARDS, BUT IT DON'T FOLLOW THAT I'M TO HAVE 'EM FOR TEA."

said, spreading her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out her own unworthiness, "Oh no, no! He don't want me. He don't want me!"

The little altercation between them had attracted the notice of Mr. Dombey, who inquired,

from the table where he was sitting at his wine, what the matter was.

"Miss Florence was afraid of interrupting, sir, if she came in to say good night," said Richards.

"It doesn't matter," returned Mr. Dombey.

"You can let her come and go without regarding me."

The child shrunk as she listened—and was gone before her humble friend looked round again.

However, Polly triumphed not a little in the success of her well-intentioned scheme, and in the address with which she had brought it to bear: whereof she made a full disclosure to Spitfire when she was once more safely entrenched upstairs. Miss Nipper received that proof of her confidence, as well as the prospect of their free association for the future, rather coldly, and was anything but enthusiastic in her demonstrations of joy.

"I thought you would have been pleased," said Polly.

"Oh yes, Mrs. Richards, I'm very well pleased, thank you," returned Susan, who had suddenly become so very upright that she seemed to have put an additional bone in her stays.

"You don't show it," said Polly.

"Oh! Being only a permanency I couldn't be expected to show it like a temporary," said Susan Nipper. "Temporaries carries it all before 'em here, I find, but though there's a excellent party-wall between this house and the next, I mayn't exactly like to go to it, Mrs. Richards, notwithstanding!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH SOME MORE FIRST APPEARANCES ARE MADE ON THE STAGE OF THESE ADVENTURES.

THOUGH the offices of Dombey and Son were within the liberties of the city of London, and within hearing of Bow Bells, when their clashing voices were not drowned by the uproar in the streets, yet were there hints of adventurous and romantic story to be observed in some of the adjacent objects. Gog and Magog held their state within ten minutes' walk; the Royal Exchange was close at hand; the Bank of England, with its vaults of gold and silver "down among the dead men" underground, was their magnificent neighbour. Just round the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm-trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes. Anywhere in the immediate vicinity there might be seen pictures of ships

DOMBEY AND SON, 2.

speeding away full sail to all parts of the world; outfitting warehouses ready to pack off anybody anywhere, fully equipped, in half an hour; and little timber midshipmen in obsolete naval uniforms, eternally employed outside the shop-doors of nautical instrument-makers in taking observations of the hackney coaches.

Sole master and proprietor of one of these effigies—of that which might be called, familiarly, the woodenest—of that which thrust itself out above the pavement, right leg foremost, with a suavity the least endurable, and had the shoe buckles and flapped waistcoat the least reconcilable to human reason, and bore at its right eye the most offensively disproportionate piece of machinery—sole master and proprietor of that midshipman, and proud of him too, an elderly gentleman in a Welsh wig had paid house rent, taxes, and dues, for more years than many a full-grown midshipman of flesh and blood has numbered in his life; and midshipmen who have attained a pretty green old age have not been wanting in the English navy.

The stock-in-trade of this old gentleman comprised chronometers, barometers, telescopes, compasses, charts, maps, sextants, quadrants, and specimens of every kind of instrument used in the working of a ship's course, or the keeping of a ship's reckoning, or the prosecuting of a ship's discoveries. Objects in brass and glass were in his drawers and on his shelves, which none but the initiated could have found the top of, or guessed the use of, or, having once examined, could have ever got back again into their mahogany nests without assistance. Everything was jammed into the tightest cases, fitted into the narrowest corners, fenced up behind the most impertinent cushions, and screwed into the acutest angles, to prevent its philosophical composure from being disturbed by the rolling of the sea. Such extraordinary precautions were taken in every instance to save room, and keep the thing compact; and so much practical navigation was fitted, and cushioned, and screwed into every box (whether the box was a mere slab, as some were, or something between a cocked-hat and a star-fish, as others were, and those quite mild and modest boxes as compared with others); that the shop itself, partaking of the general infection, seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern, wanting only good sea-room, in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world.

Many minor incidents in the household life of the Ships' Instrument-maker, who was proud of his little midshipman, assisted and bore out this

fancy. His acquaintance lying chiefly among ship-chandlers and so forth, he had always plenty of the veritable ships' biscuit on his table. It was familiar with dried meats and tongues, possessing an extraordinary flavour of rope yarn. Pickles were produced upon it, in great wholesale jars, with "dealer in all kinds of Ships' Provisions" on the label; spirits were set forth in case-bottles with no throats. Old prints of ships, with alphabetical references to their various mysteries, hung in frames upon the walls; the Tartar Frigate under way was on the plates; outlandish shells, seaweeds, and mosses decorated the chimney-piece; the little wainscoted back-parlour was lighted by a sky-light, like a cabin.

Here he lived, too, in skipper-like state, all alone with his nephew Walter: a boy of fourteen, who looked quite enough like a midshipman to carry out the prevailing idea. But there it ended, for Solomon Gills himself (more generally called Old Sol) was far from having a maritime appearance. To say nothing of his Welsh wig, which was as plain and stubborn a Welsh wig as ever was worn, and in which he looked like anything but a Rover, he was a slow, quiet-spoken, thoughtful old fellow, with eyes as red as if they had been small suns looking at you through a fog; and a newly-awakened manner, such as he might have acquired by having stared for three or four days successively through every optical instrument in his shop, and suddenly came back to the world again, to find it green. The only change ever known in his outward man was from a complete suit of coffee-colour cut very square, and ornamented with glaring buttons, to the same suit of coffee-colour minus the inexpressibles, which were then of a pale nankeen. He wore a very precise shirt-frill, and carried a pair of first-rate spectacles on his forehead, and a tremendous chronometer in his fob, rather than doubt which precious possession, he would have believed in a conspiracy against it on the part of all the clocks and watches in the City, and even of the very Sun itself. Such as he was, such he had been in the shop and parlour behind the little midshipman for years upon years; going regularly aloft to bed every night in a howling garret remote from the lodgers, where, when gentlemen of England who lived below at ease had little or no idea of the state of the weather, it often blew great guns.

It is half-past five o'clock, and an autumn afternoon, when the reader and Solomon Gills become acquainted. Solomon Gills is in the act of seeing what time it is by the unimpeachable chronometer. The usual daily clearance has

been making in the City for an hour or more; and the human tide is still rolling westward. "The streets have thinned," as Mr. Gills says, "very much." It threatens to be wet to-night. All the weather-glasses in the shop are in low spirits, and the rain already shines upon the cocked-hat of the Wooden Midshipman.

"Where's Walter, I wonder?" said Solomon Gills, after he had carefully put up the chronometer again. "Here's dinner been ready half an hour, and no Walter!"

Turning round upon his stool behind the counter, Mr. Gills looked out among the instruments in the window, to see if his nephew might be crossing the road. No. He was not among the bobbing umbrellas, and he certainly was not the newspaper boy in the oil-skin cap who was slowly working his way along the piece of brass outside, writing his name over Mr. Gills's name with his forefinger.

"If I didn't know he was too fond of me to make a run of it, and go and enter himself aboard ship against my wishes, I should begin to be fidgety," said Mr. Gills, tapping two or three weather-glasses with his knuckles. "I really should. All in the Downs, eh? Lots of moisture! Well! it's wanted."

"I believe," said Mr. Gills, blowing the dust off the glass top of a compass case, "that you don't point more direct and due to the back-parlour than the boy's inclination does, after all. And the parlour couldn't bear straighter either. Due north." Not the twentieth part of a point either way."

"Halloa, Uncle Sol!"

"Halloa, my boy!" cried the instrument-maker, turning briskly round. "What! you are here, are you?"

A cheerful-looking, merry boy, fresh with running home in the rain; fair-faced, bright-eyed, and curly-haired.

"Well, uncle, how have you got on without me all day? Is dinner ready? I'm so hungry."

"As to getting on," said Solomon, good-naturedly, "it would be odd if I couldn't get on without a young dog like you a great deal better than with you. As to dinner being ready, it's been ready this half-hour, and waiting for you. As to being hungry, I am!"

"Come along, then, uncle!" cried the boy. "Hurrah for the admiral!"

"Confound the admiral!" returned Solomon Gills. "You mean the Lord Mayor."

"No, I don't!" cried the boy. "Hurrah for the admiral! Hurrah for the admiral! For—ward!"

At this word of command the Welsh wig

and its wearer were borne without resistance into the back-parlour, as at the head of a boarding party of five hundred men; and Uncle Sol and his nephew were speedily engaged on a fried sole, with a prospect of steak to follow.

"The Lord Mayor, Wally," said Solomon, "for ever! No more admirals. The Lord Mayor's *your* admiral."

"Oh, is he, though?" said the boy, shaking his head. "Why, the Sword Bearer's better than him. He draws *his* sword sometimes."

"And a pretty figure he cuts with it for his pains," returned the uncle. "Listen to me, Wally, listen to me. Look on the mantel-shelf."

"Why, who has cocked my silver mug up there on a nail?" exclaimed the boy.

"I have," said his uncle. "No more mugs now. We must begin to drink out of glasses to-day, Walter. We are men of business. We belong to the City. We started in life this morning."

"Well, uncle," said the boy, "I'll drink out of anything you like, so long as I can drink to you. Here's to you, Uncle Sol, and hurrah for the—"

"Lord Mayor," interrupted the old man.

"For the Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, Common Council, and Livery," said the boy. "Long life to 'em!"

The uncle nodded his head with great satisfaction. "And now," he said, "let's hear something about the Firm."

"Oh! there's not much to be told about the Firm, uncle," said the boy, plying his knife and fork. "It's a precious dark set of offices, and in the room where I sit there's a high fender, and an iron safe, and some cards about ships that are going to sail, and an almanac, and some desks and stools, and an ink-bottle, and some books, and some boxes, and a lot of cobwebs, and in one of 'em, just over my head, a shrivelled-up blue-bottle that looks as if it had hung there ever so long."

"Nothing else?" said the uncle.

"No, nothing else, except an old bird-cage (I wonder how *that* ever came there!) and a coal-scuttle."

"No bankers' books; or cheque books, or bills, or such tokens, of wealth rolling in from day to day?" said old Sol, looking wistfully at his nephew out of the fog that always seemed to hang about him, and laying an unctuous emphasis upon the words.

"Oh yes, plenty of that, I suppose," returned his nephew carelessly; "but all that sort of thing's in Mr. Carker's room, or Mr. Morfin's, or Mr. Dombey's."

"Has Mr. Dombey been there to-day?" inquired the uncle.

"Oh yes! In and out all day."

"He didn't take any notice of you, I suppose?"

"Yes, he did. He walked up to my seat—I wish he wasn't so solemn and stiff, uncle—and said, 'Oh! you are the son of Mr. Gills, the Ships' Instrument-maker.' 'Nephew, sir,' I said. 'I said nephew, boy,' said he. But I could take my oath he said son, uncle."

"You're mistaken I dare say. It's no matter."

"No, it's no matter, but he needn't have been so sharp, I thought. There was no harm in it, though he did say son. Then he told me that you had spoken to him about me, and that he had found me employment in the House accordingly, and that I was expected to be attentive and punctual, and then he went away. I thought he didn't seem to like me much."

"You mean, I suppose," observed the instrument-maker, "that you didn't seem to like him much."

"Well, uncle," returned the boy, laughing, "perhaps so; I never thought of that."

Solomon looked a little graver as he finished his dinner, and glanced from time to time at the boy's bright face. When dinner was done, and the cloth was cleared away (the entertainment had been brought from a neighbouring eating-house), he lighted a candle, and went down below into a little cellar, while his nephew, standing on the mouldy staircase, dutifully held the light. After a moment's groping here and there, he presently returned with a very ancient-looking bottle, covered with dust and dirt.

"Why, Uncle Sol!" said the boy, "what are you about? That's the wonderful madeira!—there's only one more bottle!"

Uncle Sol nodded his head, implying that he knew very well what he was about; and having drawn the cork in solemn silence, filled two glasses, and set the bottle and a third clean glass on the table.

"You shall drink the other bottle, Willy," he said, "when you come to good fortune; when you are a thriving, respected, happy man; when the start in life you have made to-day shall have brought you—as I pray Heaven it may!—to a smooth part of the course: you have to run, my child. My love to you!"

Some of the fog that hung about old Sol seemed to have got into his throat; for he spoke huskily. His hand shook, too, as he clinked his glass against his nephew's. But, having

once got the wine to his lips, he tossed it off like a man, and smacked them afterwards.

"Dear uncle," said the boy, affecting to make light of it, while the tears stood in his eyes, "for the honour you have done me, et cetera, et cetera. I shall now beg to propose Mr. Solomon Gills, with three times three and one cheer more. Hurrah! and you'll return thanks, uncle, when we drink the last bottle together; won't you?"

They clinked their glasses again; and Walter, who was hoarding his wine, took a sip of it, and held the glass up to his eye with as critical an air as he could possibly assume.

His uncle sat looking at him for some time in silence. When their eyes at last met, he began at once to pursue the theme that had occupied his thoughts aloud, as if he had been speaking all the while.

"You see, Walter," he said, "in truth, this business is merely a habit with me. I am so accustomed to the habit that I could hardly live if I relinquished it: but there's nothing doing, nothing doing. When that uniform was worn," pointing out towards the little midshipman, "then indeed fortunes were to be made, and were made. But competition, competition—new invention, new invention—alteration, alteration—the world's gone past me. I hardly know where I am myself; much less where my customers are."

"Never mind 'em, uncle!"

"Since you came home from weekly boarding-school at Peckham, for instance—and that's ten days," said Solomon—"I don't remember more than one person that has come into the shop."

"Two, uncle, don't you recollect? There was the man who came to ask for change for a sovereign——"

"That's the one," said Solomon.

"Why, uncle! don't you call the woman anybody, who came to ask the way to Mile-end Turnpike?"

"Oh! it's true," said Solomon, "I forgot her. Two persons."

"To be sure they didn't buy anything," cried the boy.

"No. They didn't buy anything," said Solomon quietly.

"Nor want anything," cried the boy.

"No. If they had, they'd gone to another shop," said Solomon in the same tone.

"But there were two of 'em, uncle," cried the boy, as if that were a great triumph. "You said only one."

"Well, Wally," resumed the old man after a

short pause: "not being like the savages who came on Robinson Crusoe's island, we can't live on a man who asks for change for a sovereign, and a woman who inquires the way to Mile-end Turnpike. As I said just now, the world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I no longer understand it. Tradesmen are not the same as they used to be, apprentices are not the same, business is not the same, business commodities are not the same. Seven-eighths of my stock is old-fashioned. I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead confuses me."

Walter was going to speak, but his uncle held up his hand.

"Therefore, Wally—therefore it is that I am anxious you should be early in the busy world, and on the world's track. I am only the ghost of this business—its substance vanished long ago: and, when I die, its ghost will be laid. As it is clearly no inheritance for you, then, I have thought it best to use, for your advantage, almost the only fragment of the old connection that stands by me, through long habit. Some people suppose me to be wealthy. I wish, for your sake, they were right. But whatever I leave behind me, or whatever I can give you, you, in such a house as Dombey's, are in the road to use well and make the most of. Be diligent, try to like it, my dear boy, work for a steady independence, and be happy!"

"I'll do everything I can, uncle, to deserve your affection. Indeed I will," said the boy earnestly.

"I know it," said Solomon. "I am sure of it;" and he applied himself to a second glass of the old madeira with increased relish. "As to the sea," he pursued, "that's well enough in fiction, Wally, but it won't do in fact: it won't do at all. It's natural enough that you should think about it, associating it with all these familiar things; but it won't do, it won't do."

Solomon Gills rubbed his hands with an air of stealthy enjoyment as he talked of the sea, though; and looked on the seafaring objects about him with inexpressible complacency.

"Think of this wine, for instance," said old Sol, "which has been to the East Indies and back, I'm not able to say how often, and has been once round the world. Think of the pitch-dark nights, the roaring winds, and rolling seas——"

"The thunder, lightning, rain, hail, storms of all kinds," said the boy.

"To be sure," said Solomon,—"that this wine has passed through. Think what a straining and creaking of timbers and masts; what a whistling and howling of the gale through ropes and rigging—"

"What a clambering aloft of men, vying with each other who shall lie out first upon the yards to furl the icy sails, while the ship rolls and pitches like mad!" cried his nephew.

"Exactly so," said Solomon,—"has gone on over the old cask that held this wine. Why, when the Charming Sally went down in the—"

"In the Baltic Sea, in the dead of night, five-and-twenty minutes past twelve, when the captain's watch stopped in his pocket; he lying dead against the mainmast—on the fourteenth of February, seventeen forty-nine!" cried Walter with great animation.

"Ay! to be sure!" cried old Sol, "quite right! Then, there were five hundred casks of such wine aboard; and all hands (except the first mate, first lieutenant, two seamen, and a lady, in a leaky boat), going to work to stave the casks, got drunk and died drunk, singing 'Rule Britannia' when she settled and went down, and ending with one awful scream in chorus."

"But when the *George* the Second drove ashore, uncle, on the coast of Cornwall, in a dismal gale two hours before daybreak, on the fourth of March, 'seventy-one, she had near two hundred horses aboard; and the horses breaking loose down below, early in the gale, and tearing to and fro, and trampling each other to death, made such noises, and set up such human cries, that the crew believing the ship to be full of devils, some of the best men, losing heart and head, went overboard in despair, and only two were left alive, at last, to tell the tale."

"And when," said old Sol, "when the *Polyphemus*—"

"Private West India Trader, burden three hundred and fifty tons, Captain, John Brown of Deptford. Owners, Wiggs and Co.," cried Walter.

"The same," said Sol,—"when she took fire, four days' sail with a fair wind out of Jamaica Harbour, in the night—"

"There were two brothers on board," interposed his nephew, speaking very fast and loud, "and there not being room for both of them in the only boat that wasn't swamped, neither of them would consent to go, until the elder took the younger by the waist and flung him in. And then the younger, rising in the boat, cried out,

Dear Edward, think of your promised wife at

home. I'm only a boy. No one waits at home for me. Leap down into my place!" and flung himself in the sea!"

The kindling eye and heightened colour of the boy, who had risen from his seat in the earnestness of what he said and felt, seemed to remind old Sol of something he had forgotten, or that his encircling mist had hitherto shut out. Instead of proceeding with any more anecdotes, as he had evidently intended but a moment before, he gave a short dry cough, and said, "Well! suppose we change the subject."

The truth was, that the simple-minded uncle, in his secret attraction towards the marvellous and adventurous—of which he was, in some sort, a distant relation by his trade—had greatly encouraged the same attraction in the nephew; and that everything that had ever been put before the boy to deter him from a life of adventure, had had the usual unaccountable effect of sharpening his taste for it. This is invariable. It would seem as if there never was a book written, or a story told, expressly with the object of keeping boys on shore, which did not lure and charm them to the ocean as a matter of course.

But an addition to the little party now made its appearance, in the shape of a gentleman in a wide suit of blue, with a hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist; very bushy black eyebrows; and a thick stick in his left hand, covered all over (like his nose) with knobs. He wore a loose black silk handkerchief round his neck, and such a very large, coarse shirt collar, that it looked like a small sail. He was evidently the person for whom the spare wine-glass was intended, and evidently knew it; for, having taken off his rough outer coat, and hung up, on a particular peg behind the door, such a hard glazed hat as a sympathetic person's head might ache at the sight of, and which left a red rim round his own forehead as if he had been wearing a tight basin, he brought a chair to where the clean glass was, and sat himself down behind it. He was usually addressed as Captain, this visitor; and had been a pilot, or a skipper, or a privateersman, or all three perhaps; and was a very salt-looking man indeed.

His face, remarkable for a brown solidity, brightened as he shook hands with uncle and nephew; but he seemed to be of a laconic disposition, and merely said:

"How goes it?"

"All well," said Mr. Gills, pushing the bottle towards him.

He took it up, and having surveyed and smelt it, said with extraordinary expression:

"*The?*"

"*The,*" returned the instrument-maker.

Upon that he whistled as he filled his glass, and seemed to think they were making holiday indeed.

"Wal'r!" he said, arranging his hair (which was thin) with his hook, and then pointing it at the instrument-maker, "look at him! Love! Honour! And Obey! Overhaul your catechism till you find that passage, and when found turn the leaf down. Success, my boy!"

He was so perfectly satisfied both with his quotation and his reference to it, that he could not help repeating the words again in a low voice, and saying he had forgotten 'em these forty year.

"But I never wanted two or three words in my life that I didn't know where to lay my hand upon 'em, Gills," he observed. "It comes of not wasting language as some do."

The reflection perhaps reminded him that he had better, like young Norval's father, "increase his store." At any rate, he became silent, and remained so, until old Sol went out into the shop to light it up, when he turned to Walter, and said, without any introductory remark:

"I suppose he could make a clock if he tried?"

"I shouldn't wonder, Captain Cuttle," returned the boy.

"And it would go!" said Captain Cuttle, making a species of serpent in the air with his hook. "Lord, how that clock would go!"

For a moment or two he seemed quite lost in contemplating the pace of this ideal time-piece, and sat looking at the boy as if his face were the dial.

"But he's chock-full of science," he observed, waving his hook towards the stock-in-trade. "Lookye here! Here's a collection of 'em. Earth, air, or water. It's all one. Only say where you'll have it. Up in a balloon? There you are. Down in a bell? There you are. D'ye want to put the North Stan in a pair of scales, and weigh it? He'll do it for you."

It may be gathered from these remarks that Captain Cuttle's reverence for the stock of instruments was profound, and that his philosophy knew little or no distinction between trading in it and inventing it.

"Ah!" he said, with a sigh, "it's a fine thing to understand 'em. And yet it's a fine thing not to understand 'em. I hardly know which is best. It's so comfortable to sit here, and feel that you might be weighed, measured, magnified, electrified, polarized, played the very devil with: and never know how."

Nothing short of the wonderful madeira, combined with the occasion (which rendered it desirable to improve and expand Walter's mind), could have ever loosened his tongue to the extent of giving utterance to this prodigious oration. He seemed quite amazed himself at the manner in which it opened up to view the sources of the taciturn delight he had had in eating Sunday dinners in that parlour for ten years. Becoming a sadder and a wiser man, he mused and held his peace.

"Come!" cried the subject of his admiration, returning. "Before you have your glass of grog, Ned, we must finish the bottle."

"Stand by!" said Ned, filling his glass. "Give the boy some more."

"No more, thankee, uncle!"

"Yes, yes," said Sol, "a little more. We'll finish the bottle, to the House, Ned—Walter's house. Why, it may be his house one of these days, in part. Who knows? Sir Richard Whittington married his master's daughter."

"Turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you are old you will never depart from it," interposed the Captain. "Wal'r! Overhaul the book, my lad."

"And although Mr. Dombey hasn't a daughter——" Sol began.

"Yes, yes, he has, uncle," said the boy, reddening and laughing.

"Has he?" cried the old man. "Indeed, I think he has, too."

"Oh! I know he has," said the boy. "Some of 'em were talking about it in the office to-day. And they do say, uncle and Captain Cuttle," lowering his voice, "that he's taken a dislike to her, and that she's left unnoticed among the servants, and that his mind's so set all the while upon having his son in the House, that although he's only a baby now, he is going to have balances struck oftener than formerly, and the books kept closer than they used to be, and has even been seen (when he thought he wasn't) walking in the Docks, looking at his ships and property and all that, as if he was exulting like over what he and his son will possess together. That's what they say. Of course, I don't know."

"He knows all about her already, you see," said the instrument-maker.

"Nonsense, uncle," cried the boy, still reddening and laughing, boy-like. "How can I help hearing what they tell me?"

"The son's a little in our way at present, I'm afraid, Ned," said the old man, humouring the joke.

"Very much," said the captain.

"Nevertheless, we'll drink him," pursued Sol. "So, here's to Dombey and Son."

"Oh, very well, uncle," said the boy merrily. "Since you have introduced the mention of her, and have connected me with her, and have said that I know all about her, I shall make bold to amend the toast. So, here's to Dombey—and Son—and Daughter!"

CHAPTER V.

PAUL'S PROGRESS AND CHRISTENING.

LITTLE Paul, suffering no contamination from the blood of the Toodles, grew stouter and stronger every day. Every day, too, he was more and more ardently cherished by Miss Tox, whose devotion was so far appreciated by Mr. Dombey that he began to regard her as a woman of great natural sense, whose feelings did her credit and deserved encouragement. He was so lavish of this condescension, that he not only bowed to her, in a particular manner, on several occasions, but even intrusted such stately recognitions of her to his sister as "Pray tell your friend, Louisa, that she is very good," or "Mention to Miss Tox, Louisa, that I am obliged to her;" specialities which made a deep impression on the lady thus distinguished.

Miss Tox was often in the habit of assuring Mrs. Chick that "nothing could exceed her interest in all connected with the development of that sweet child;" and an observer of Miss Tox's proceedings might have inferred so much without declaratory confirmation. She would preside over the innocent repasts of the young heir with ineffable satisfaction, almost with an air of joint proprietorship with Richards in the entertainment. At the little ceremonies of the bath and toilet she assisted with enthusiasm. The administration of infantine doses of physic awakened all the active sympathy of her character; and being on one occasion secreted in a cupboard (whither she had fled in modesty) when Mr. Dombey was introduced into the nursery by his sister, to behold his son, in the course of preparation for bed, taking a short walk uphill over Richards's gown, in a short and airy linen jacket, Miss Tox was so transported beyond the ignorant present as to be unable to refrain from crying out, "Is he not beautiful, Mr. Dombey? Is he not a Cupid, sir?" and

then almost sinking behind the closet door with confusion and blushes.

"Louisa," said Mr. Dombey, one day, to his sister, "I really think I must present your friend with some little token on the occasion of Paul's christening. She has exerted herself so warmly in the child's behalf from the first, and seems to understand her position so thoroughly (a very rare merit in this world, I am sorry to say), that it would really be agreeable to me to notice her."

Let it be no detraction from the merits of Miss Tox to hint that in Mr. Dombey's eyes, as in some others that occasionally see the light, they only achieved that mighty piece of knowledge, the understanding of their own position, who showed a fitting reverence for his. It was not so much their merit that they knew themselves, as that they knew him, and bowed low before him.

"My dear Paul," returned his sister, "you do Miss Tox but justice, as a man of your penetration was sure, I knew, to do. I believe, if there are three words in the English language for which she has a respect amounting almost to veneration, those words are, Dombey and Son."

"Well," said Mr. Dombey, "I believe it. It does Miss Tox credit."

"And as to anything in the shape of a token, my dear Paul," pursued his sister, "all I can say is, that anything you give Miss Tox will be hoarded and prized, I am sure, like a relic. But there is a way, my dear Paul, of showing your sense of Miss Tox's friendliness in a still more flattering and acceptable manner, if you should be so inclined."

"How is that?" asked Mr. Dombey.

"Godfathers, of course," continued Mrs. Chick, "are important in point of connection and influence."

"I don't know why they should be to my son," said Mr. Dombey coldly.

"Very true, my dear Paul," retorted Mrs. Chick, with an extraordinary show of animation, to cover the suddenness of her conversion; "and spoken like yourself. I might have expected nothing else from you. I might have known that such would have been your opinion. Perhaps"—here Mrs. Chick flattered again, as not quite comfortably feeling her way—"perhaps that is a reason why you might have the less objection to allowing Miss Tox to be godmother to the dear thing, if it were only as deputy and proxy for some one else. That it would be received as a great honour and distinction, Paul, I need not say."

"Louisa," said Mr. Dombey after a short pause, "it is not to be supposed——"

"Certainly not," cried Mrs. Chick, hastening to anticipate a refusal; "I never thought it was."

Mr. Dombey looked at her impatiently.

"Don't flurry me, my dear Paul," said his sister; "for that destroys me. I am far from

strong. I have not been quite myself since poor dear Fanny departed."

Mr. Dombey glanced at the pocket-handkerchief which his sister applied to her eyes, and resumed:

"It is not to be supposed, I say——"



"SO, HERE'S TO DOMBEY—AND SON—AND DAUGHTER!"

"And I say," murmured Mrs. Chick, "that I never thought it was."

"Good Heaven, Louisa!" said Mr. Dombey.

"No, my dear Paul," she remonstrated with tearful dignity, "I must really be allowed to speak. I am not so clever, or so reasoning, or

so eloquent, or so anything as you are. I know that very well. So much the worse for me. But if they were the last words I had to utter—and last words should be very solemn to you and me, Paul, after poor dear Fanny—I should still say I never thought it was. And what is more,"

added Mrs. Chick with increased dignity, as if she had withheld her crushing argument until now, "I never *did* think it was."

Mr. Dombey walked to the window and back again.

"It is not to be supposed, Louisa," he said (Mrs. Chick had nailed her colours to the mast, and repeated "I know it isn't," but he took no notice of it), "but that there are many persons who, supposing that I recognised any claim at all in such a case, have a claim upon me superior to Miss Tox's. But I do not. I recognise no such thing. Paul and myself will be able, when the time comes, to hold our own—the House, in other words, will be able to hold its own, and maintain its own, and hand down its own of itself, and without any such commonplace aids. The kind of foreign help which people usually seek for their children I can afford to despise; being above it, I hope. So that Paul's infancy and childhood pass away well, and I see him becoming qualified, without waste of time, for the career on which he is destined to enter, I am satisfied. He will make what powerful friends he pleases in after life, when he is actively maintaining—and extending, if that is possible—the dignity and credit of the Firm. Until then, I am enough for him, perhaps, and all in all. I have no wish that people should step in between us. I would much rather show my sense of the obliging conduct of a deserving person like your friend. Therefore let it be so; and your husband and myself will do well enough for the other sponsors, I dare say."

In the course of these remarks, delivered with great majesty and grandeur, Mr. Dombey had truly revealed the secret feelings of his breast. An indescribable distrust of anybody stepping in between himself and his son; a haughty dread of having any rival or partner in the boy's respect and deference; a sharp misgiving, recently acquired, that he was not infallible in his power of bending and binding human wills; as sharp a jealousy of any second check or cross; these were, at that time, the master keys of his soul. In all his life he had never made a friend. His cold and distant nature had neither sought one, nor found one. And now, when that nature concentrated its whole force so strongly on a partial scheme of parental interest and ambition, it seemed as if its icy current, instead of being released by this influence, and running clear and free, had thawed for but an instant to admit its burden, and then frozen with it into one unyielding block.

Elevated thus to the godmotherhood of little Paul, in virtue of her insignificance, Miss Tox

was from that hour chosen and appointed to office; and Mr. Dombey further signified his pleasure that the ceremony, already long delayed, should take place without further postponement. His sister, who had been far from anticipating so signal a success, withdrew as soon as she could, to communicate it to her best of friends; and Mr. Dombey was left alone in his library.

There was anything but solitude in the nursery; for there Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox were enjoying a social evening, so much to the disgust of Miss Susan Nipper, that that young lady embraced every opportunity of making wry faces behind the door. Her feelings were so much excited on the occasion, that she found it indispensable to afford them this relief, even without having the comfort of any audience or sympathy whatever. As the knight-errants of old relieved their minds by carving their mistresses' names in deserts and wildernesses, and other savage places where there was no probability of there ever being anybody to read them, so did Miss Susan Nipper curl her snub nose into drawers and wardrobes, put away winks of disparagement in cupboards, shed derisive squints into stone pitchers, and contradict and call names out in the passage.

The two interlopers, however, blissfully unconscious of the young lady's sentiments, saw little Paul safe through all the stages of undressing, airy exercise, supper, and bed; and then sat down to tea before the fire. The two children now lay, through the good offices of Polly, in one room; and it was not until the ladies were established at their tea-table that, happening to look towards the little beds, they thought of Florence.

"How sound she sleeps!" said Miss Tox.

"Why, you know, my dear, she takes a great deal of exercise in the course of the day," returned Mrs. Chick, "playing about little Paul so much."

"She is a curious child," said Miss Tox.

"My dear," retorted Mrs. Chick in a low voice: "her mamma all over!"

"In-deed!" said Miss Tox. "Ah dear me!"

A tone of most extraordinary compassion Miss Tox said it in, though she had no distinct idea why, except that it was expected of her.

"Florence will never, never, never be a Dombey," said Mrs. Chick, "not if she lives to be a thousand years old."

Miss Tox elevated her eyebrows, and was again full of commiseration.

"I quite fret and worry myself about her," said Mrs. Chick, with a sigh of modest merit,

"I really don't see what is to become of her when she grows older, or what position she is to take. She don't gain on her papa in the least. How can one expect she should, when she is so very unlike a Dombey?"

Miss Tox looked as, if she saw no way out of such a cogent argument as that at all.

"And the child, you see," said Mrs. Chick in deep confidence, "has poor Fanny's nature. She'll never make an effort in after life, I'll venture to say. Never! She'll never wind and twine herself about her papa's heart like——"

"Like the ivy?" suggested Miss Tox.

"Like the ivy," Mrs. Chick assented. "Never! She'll never glide and nestle into the bosom of her papa's affections like—the——"

"Startled fawn?" suggested Miss Tox.

"Like the startled fawn," said Mrs. Chick. "Never! Poor Fanny! Yet how I loved her!"

"You must not distress yourself, my dear," said Miss Tox in a soothing voice. "Now, really! You have too much feeling."

"We have all our faults," said Mrs. Chick, weeping and shaking her head. "I dare say we have. I never was blind to hers. I never said I was. Far from it. Yet how I loved her!"

What a satisfaction it was to Mrs. Chick—a commonplace piece of folly enough, compared with whom her sister-in-law had been a very angel of womanly intelligence and gentleness—to patronise and be tender to the memory of that lady: in exact pursuance of her conduct to her in her lifetime: and to thoroughly believe herself, and take herself in, and make herself uncommonly comfortable on the strength of her toleration! What a mighty pleasant virtue toleration should be when we are right, to be so very pleasant when we are wrong, and quite unable to demonstrate how we come to be invested with the privilege of exercising it!

Mrs. Chick was yet drying her eyes and shaking her head, when Richards made bold to caution her that Miss Florence was awake and sitting in her bed. She had risen, as the nurse said, and the lashes of her eyes were wet with tears. But no one saw them glistening save Polly. No one else leant over her, and whispered soothing words to her, or was near enough to hear the flutter of her beating heart.

"Oh! dear nurse!" said the child, looking earnestly up in her face, "let me lie by my brother!"

"Why, my pet?" said Richards.

"Oh! I think he loves me," cried the child wildly. "Let me lie by him. Pray do!"

Mrs. Chick interposed with some motherly words about going to sleep like a dear, but

Florence repeated her supplication, with a frightened look and in a voice broken by sobs and tears.

"I'll not wake him," she said, covering her face, and hanging down her head. "I'll only touch him with my hand, and go to sleep. Oh, pray, pray let me lie by my brother to-night, for I believe he's fond of me!"

Richards took her without a word, and carrying her to the little bed in which the infant was sleeping, laid her down by his side. She crept as near him as she could without disturbing his rest; and stretching out one arm so that it timidly embraced his neck, and hiding her face on the other, over which her damp and scattered hair fell loose, lay motionless.

"Poor little thing!" said Miss Tox; "she has been dreaming, I dare say."

This trivial incident had so interrupted the current of conversation, that it was difficult of resumption; and Mrs. Chick, moreover, had been so affected by the contemplation of her own tolerant nature, that she was not in spirits. The two friends accordingly soon made an end of their tea, and a servant was dispatched to fetch a hackney cabriolet for Miss Tox. Miss Tox had great experience in hackney cabs, and her starting in one was generally a work of time, as she was systematic in the preparatory arrangements.

"Have the goodness, if you please, Towlinson," said Miss Tox, "first of all, to carry out a pen and ink and take his number legibly."

"Yes, miss," said Towlinson.

"Then, if you please, Towlinson," said Miss Tox, "have the goodness to turn the cushion. Which," said Miss Tox apart to Mrs. Chick, "is generally damp, my dear!"

"Yes, miss," said Towlinson.

"I'll trouble you also, if you please," said Miss Tox, "with this card and this shilling. He's to drive to the card, and he is to understand that he will not on any account have more than the shilling."

"No, miss," said Towlinson.

"And—I'm sorry to give you so much trouble, Towlinson," said Miss Tox, looking at him pensively.

"Not at all, miss," said Towlinson.

"Mention to the man, then, if you please, Towlinson," said Miss Tox, "that the lady's uncle is a magistrate, and that if he gives her any of his impertinence he will be punished terribly. You can pretend to say that, if you please, Towlinson, in a friendly way, and because you know it was done to another man, who died."

"Certainly, miss," said Towlinson.

"And now good night to my sweet, sweet, sweet godson," said Miss Tox, with a soft shower of kisses at each repetition of the adjective; "and Louisa, my dear friend, promise me to take a little something warm before you go to bed, and not to distress yourself!"

It was with extreme difficulty that Nipper, the black-eyed, who looked on steadfastly, contained herself at this crisis, and until the subsequent departure of Mrs. Chick. But the nursery being at length free of visitors, she made herself some recompense for her late restraint.

"You might keep me in a strait-waistcoat for six weeks," said Nipper, "and when I go it off I'd only be more aggravated, who ever heard the like of them two Griffins, Mrs. Richards?"

"And then to talk of having been dreaming, poor dear!" said Polly.

"Oh you beauties!" cried Susan Nipper, affecting to salute the door by which the ladies had departed. "Never be a Dombey, won't she, it's to be hoped she won't, we don't want any more such, one's enough."

"Don't wake the children, Susan dear," said Polly.

"I'm very much beholden to you, Mrs. Richards," said Susan, who was not by any means discriminating in her wrath, "and really feel it as a honour to receive your commands, being a black slave and a mulotter. Mrs. Richards, if there's any other orders you can give me, pray mention 'em."

"Nonsense; orders," said Polly.

"Oh! bless your heart, Mrs. Richards," cried Susan, "temporaries always orders permanencies here, didn't you know that, why, wherever was you born, Mrs. Richards? But, wherever you was born, Mrs. Richards," pursued Spitfire, shaking her head resolutely, "and whenever, and however (which is best known to yourself), you may bear in mind, please, that it's one thing to give orders, and quite another thing to take 'em. A person may tell a person to dive off a bridge head foremost into five-and-forty feet of water, Mrs. Richards, but a person may be very far from diving."

"There now," said Polly, "you're angry because you're a good little thing, and fond of Miss Florence; and yet you turn round on me, because there's nobody else."

"It's very easy for some to keep their tempers, and be soft-spoken, Mrs. Richards," returned Susan, slightly mollified, "when their child's made as much of as a prince, and is petted and patted till it wishes its friends further, but when a sweet young pretty innocent, that never ought

to have a cross word spoken to or of it, is run down, the case is very different indeed. My goodness gracious me, Miss Floy, you naughty, sinful child, if you don't shut your eyes this minute, I'll call in them hobgoblins that lives in the cock-loft to come and eat you up alive!"

Here Miss Nipper made a horrible howling, supposed to issue from a conscientious goblin of the bull species, impatient to discharge the severe duty of his position. Having further composed her young charge by covering her head with the bedclothes, and making three or four angry dabs at the pillow, she folded her arms, and screwed up her mouth, and sat looking at the fire for the rest of the evening.

Though little Paul was said, in nursery phrase, "to take a deal of notice for his age," he took as little notice of all this as of the preparations for his christening on the next day but one; which nevertheless went on about him, as to his personal apparel, and that of his sister and the two nurses, with great activity. Neither did he, on the arrival of the appointed morning, show any sense of its importance; being, on the contrary, unusually inclined to sleep, and unusually inclined to take it ill in his attendants that they dressed him to go out.

It happened to be an iron-grey, autumnal day, with a shrewd east wind blowing—a day in keeping with the proceedings. Mr. Dombey represented in himself the wind, the shade, and the autumn of the christening. He stood in his library to receive the company, as hard and cold as the weather; and when he looked out through the glass room, at the trees in the little garden, their brown and yellow leaves came fluttering down, as if he blighted them.

Ugh! They were black, cold rooms; and seemed to be in mourning, like the inmates of the house. The books, precisely matched as to size, and drawn up in line like soldiers, looked, in their cold, hard, slippery uniforms, as if they had but one idea among them, and that was a freezer. The bookcase, glazed and locked, repudiated all familiarities. Mr. Pitt, in bronze on the top, with no trace of his celestial origin about him, guarded the unattainable treasure like an enchanted Moor. A dusty urn at each high corner, dug up from an ancient tomb, preached desolation and decay, as from two pulpits; and the chimney-glass, reflecting Mr. Dombey and his portrait at one blow, seemed fraught with melancholy meditations.

The stiff and stark fire-irons appeared to claim a nearer relationship than anything else there to Mr. Dombey, with his buttoned coat, his white cravat, his heavy gold watch-chain,

and his creaking boots. But this was before the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Chick, his lawful relatives, who soon presented themselves.

"My dear Paul," Mrs. Chick murmured as she embraced him, "the beginning, I hope, of many joyful days!"

"Thank you, Louisa," said Mr. Dombey grimly. "How do you do, Mr. John?"

"How do you do, sir?" said Chick.

He gave Mr. Dombey his hand, as if he feared it might electrify him. Mr. Dombey took it as if it were a fish, or seaweed, or some such clammy substance, and immediately returned it to him with exalted politeness.

"Perhaps, Louisa," said Mr. Dombey, slightly turning his head in his cravat, as if it were a socket, "you would have preferred a fire?"

"Oh, my dear Paul, no," said Mrs. Chick, who had much ado to keep her teeth from chattering; "not for me."

"Mr. John," said Mr. Dombey, "you are not sensible of any chill?"

Mr. John, who had already got both his hands in his pockets over the wrists, and was on the very threshold of that same canine chorus which had given Mrs. Chick so much offence on a former occasion, protested that he was perfectly comfortable.

He added in a low voice, "With my tiddle tol toor-ru!"—when he was providentially stopped by Towlinson, who announced:

"Miss Tox!"

And enter that fair enslaver, with a blue nose and indescribably frosty face, referable to her being very thinly clad in a maze of fluttering odds and ends, to do honour to the ceremony.

"How do you do, Miss Tox?" said Mr. Dombey.

Miss Tox, in the midst of her spreading gauzes, went down altogether like an opera-glass shutting up; she curtsied so low, in acknowledgment of Mr. Dombey's advancing a step or two to meet her.

"I can never forget this occasion, sir," said Miss Tox softly. "'Tis impossible. My dear Louisa, I can hardly believe the evidence of my senses."

If Miss Tox could believe the evidence of one of her senses, it was a very cold day. That was quite clear. She took an early opportunity of promoting the circulation in the tip of her nose by secretly chafing it with her pocket-handkerchief, lest, by its very low temperature, it should disagreeably astonish the baby when she came to kiss it.

The baby soon appeared, carried in great glory by Richards; while Florence, in custody of that

active young constable, Susan Nipper, brought up the rear. Though the whole nursery party were dressed by this time in lighter mourning than at first, there was enough in the appearance of the bereaved children to make the day no brighter. The baby, too—it might have been Miss Tox's nose—began to cry. Thereby, as it happened, preventing Mr. Chick from the awkward fulfilment of a very honest purpose he had; which was to make much of Florence. For this gentleman, insensible to the superior claims of a perfect Dombey (perhaps on account of having the honour to be united to a Dombey himself, and being familiar with excellence), really liked her, and showed that he liked her, and was about to show it in his own way now, when Paul cried, and his helpmate stopped him short.

"Now, Florence child!" said her aunt briskly, "what are you doing, love? Show yourself to him. Engage his attention, my dear!"

The atmosphere became, or might have become, colder and colder when Mr. Dombey stood frigidly watching his little daughter, who, clapping her hands, and standing on tiptoe before the throne of his son and heir, lured him to bend down from his high estate, and look at her. Some honest act of Richards's may have aided the effect, but he did look down, and held his peace. As his sister hid behind her nurse, he followed her with his eyes; and when she peeped out with a merry cry to him, he sprang up and crowded lustily—laughing outright when she ran in upon him; and seeming to fondle her curls with his tiny hands, while she smothered him with kisses.

Was Mr. Dombey pleased to see this? He testified no pleasure by the relaxation of a nerve: but outward tokens of any kind of feeling were unusual with him. If any sunbeam stole into the room to light the children at their play, it never reached his face. He looked on so fixedly and coldly, that the warm light vanished even from the laughing eyes of little Florence, when, at last, they happened to meet his.

It was a dull, grey, autumn day indeed, and, in a minute's pause and silence that took place, the leaves fell sorrowfully.

"Mr. John," said Mr. Dombey, referring to his watch, and assuming his hat and gloves, "take my sister, if you please: my arm to-day is Miss Tox's. You had better go first with Master Paul, Richards. Be very careful."

In Mr. Dombey's carriage, Dombey and Son, Miss Tox, Mrs. Chick, Richards, and Florence. In a little carriage following it, Susan Nipper and the owner, Mr. Chick. Susan looking out of window without intermission, as a relief from

the embarrassment of confronting the large face of that gentleman, and thinking, whenever anything rattled, that he was putting up in paper an appropriate pecuniary compliment for herself.

Once upon the road to church Mr. Dombey clapped his hands for the amusement of his son.

At which instance of parental enthusiasm Miss Tox was enchanted. But, exclusive of this incident, the chief difference between the christening party and a party in a mourning coach consisted in the colours of the carriage and horses.

Arrived at the church steps, they were re-



"MR. DOMBEY DISMOUNTING FIRST TO HELP THE LADIES OUT."

ceived by a portentous beadle. Mr. Dombey dismounting first to help the ladies out, and standing near him at the church-door, looked like another beadle. A beadle less gorgeous, but more dreadful; the beadle of private life; the beadle of our business and our bosoms.

Miss Tox's hand trembled as she slipped it through Mr. Dombey's arm, and felt herself escorted up the steps, preceded by a cocked-hat and a Babylonian collar. It seemed for a moment like that other solemn institution, "Wilt thou have this man, Lucretia?" "Yes, I will."

"Please to bring the child in quick out of the air there," whispered the beadle, holding open the inner door of the church.

Little Paul might have asked, with Hamlet, "Into my grave?" so chill and earthy was the place. The tall, shrouded pulpit and reading-desk; the dreary perspective of empty pews stretching away under the galleries, and empty benches mounting to the roof, and lost in the shadow of the great grim organ; the dusty matting and cold stone slabs; the grisly free seats in the aisles; and the damp corner by the bell-rope, where the black trestles used for funerals were stowed away, along with some shovels and baskets, and a coil or two of deadly-looking rope; the strange, unusual, uncomfortable smell, and the cadaverous light; were all in unison. It was a cold and dismal scene.

"There's a wedding just on, sir," said the beadle, "but it'll be over directly, if you'll walk into the westry here."

Before he turned again to lead the way, he gave Mr. Dombey a bow and a half-smile of recognition, importing that he (the beadle) remembered to have had the pleasure of attending on him when he buried his wife, and hoped he had enjoyed himself since.

The very wedding looked dismal as they passed in front of the altar. The bride was too old and the bridegroom too young, and a superannuated beau with one eye, and an eye-glass stuck in its blank companion, was giving away the lady, while the friends were shivering. In the vestry the fire was smoking; and an over-aged and overworked and under-paid attorney's clerk, "making a search," was running his forefinger down the parchment pages of an immense register (one of a long series of similar volumes) gorged with burials. Over the fire-place was a ground-plan of the vaults underneath the church; and Mr. Chick, skimming the literary portion of it aloud, by way of enlivening the company, read the reference to Mrs. Dombey's tomb in full, before he could stop himself.

After another cold interval, a wheezy little pew-opener afflicted with an asthma, appropriate to the churchyard, if not to the church, summoned them to the font. Here they waited some little time while the marriage party enrolled themselves; and meanwhile the wheezy little pew-opener—partly in consequence of her infirmity, and partly that the marriage party might not forget her—went about the building coughing like a grampus.

Presently the clerk (the only cheerful-looking object there, and *he* was an undertaker) came up

with a jug of warm water, and said something, as he poured it into the font, about taking the chill off; which millions of gallons boiling hot could not have done for the occasion. Then the clergyman, an amiable and mild-looking young curate, but obviously afraid of the baby, appeared like the principal character in a ghost story, "a tall figure all in white;" at sight of whom Paul rent the air with his cries, and never left off again till he was taken out black in the face.

Even when that event had happened, to the great relief of everybody, he was heard under the portico, during the rest of the ceremony, now fainter, now louder, now hushed, now bursting forth again with an irrepressible sense of his wrongs. This so distracted the attention of the two ladies, that Mrs. Chick was constantly deploying into the centre aisle, to send out messages by the pew-opener, while Miss Tox kept her Prayer-book open at the Gunpowder Plot, and occasionally read responses from that service.

During the whole of these proceedings Mr. Dombey remained as impassive and gentlemanly as ever, and perhaps assisted in making it so cold, that the young curate smoked at the mouth as he read. The only time that he unbent his visage in the least was when the clergyman, in delivering (very unaffectedly and simply), the closing exhortation, relative to the future examination of the child by the sponsors, happened to rest his eye on Mr. Chick; and then Mr. Dombey might have been seen to express, by a majestic look, that he would like to catch him at it.

It might have been well for Mr. Dombey if he had thought of his own dignity a little less; and had thought of the great origin and purpose of the ceremony, in which he took so formal and so stiff a part, a little more. His arrangement contrasted strangely with its history.

When it was all over, he again gave his arm to Miss Tox, and conducted her to the vestry, where he informed the clergyman how much pleasure it would have given him to have solicited the honour of his company at dinner, but for the unfortunate state of his household affairs. The register signed, and the fees paid, and the pew-opener (whose cough was very bad again) remembered, and the beadle gratified, and the sexton (who was accidentally on the door-steps, looking with great interest at the weather) not forgotten, they got into the carriage again, and drove home in the same bleak fellowship.

There they found Mr. Pitt turning up his

nose at a cold collation, set forth in a cold pomp of glass and silver, and looking more like a dead dinner lying in state than a social refreshment. On their arrival, Miss Tox produced a mug for her godson, and Mr. Chick a knife and fork and spoon in a case. Mr. Dombey also produced a bracelet for Miss Tox; and, on the receipt of this token, Miss Tox was tenderly affected.

"Mr. John," said Mr. Dombey, "will you take the bottom of the table, if you please? What have you got there, Mr. John?"

"I have got a cold fillet of veal here, sir," replied Mr. Chick, rubbing his numbed hands hard together. "What have *you* got there, sir?"

"This," returned Mr. Dombey, "is some cold preparation of calf's head, I think. I see cold fowls—ham—patties—salad—lobster. Miss Tox will do me the honour of taking some wine? Champagne to Miss Tox."

There was a toothache in everything. The wine was so bitter cold that it forced a little scream from Miss Tox, which she had great difficulty in turning into a "Hem!" The veal had come from such an airy pantry, that the first taste of it had struck a sensation as of cold lead to Mr. Chick's extremities. Mr. Dombey alone remained unmoved. He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman.

The prevailing influence was too much even for his sister. She made no effort at flattery or small-talk, and directed all her efforts to looking as warm as she could.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Chick, making a desperate plunge after a long silence, and filling a glass of sherry; "I shall drink this, if you'll allow me, sir, to little Paul."

"Bless him!" murmured Miss Tox, taking a sip of wine.

"Dear little Dombey!" murmured Mrs. Chick.

"Mr. John," said Mr. Dombey with severe gravity, "my son would feel and express himself obliged to you, I have no doubt, if he could appreciate the favour you have done him. He will prove, in time to come, I trust, equal to any responsibility that the obliging disposition of his relations and friends in private, or the onerous nature of our position in public, may impose upon him."

The tone in which this was said admitting of nothing more, Mr. Chick relapsed into low spirits and silence. Not so Miss Tox, who, having listened to Mr. Dombey with even a more emphatic attention than usual, and with a more expressive tendency of her head to one side,

now leant across the table, and said to Mrs. Chick softly:

"Louisa!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Chick.

"Onerous nature of our position in public may—I have forgotten the exact term."

"Expose him to," said Mrs. Chick.

"Pardon me, my dear," returned Miss Tox, "I think not. It was more rounded and flowing. Obliging disposition of relations and friends in private, or onerous nature of position in public—may—impose upon him?"

"Impose upon him, to be sure," said Mrs. Chick.

Miss Tox struck her delicate hands together lightly in triumph; and added, casting up her eyes, "Eloquence indeed!"

Mr. Dombey, in the meanwhile, had issued orders for the attendance of Richards, who now entered curtsying, but without the baby; Paul being asleep after the fatigues of the morning. Mr. Dombey, having delivered a glass of wine to this vassal, addressed her in the following words: Miss Tox previously settling her head on one side, and making other little arrangements for engraving them on her heart.

"During the six months or so, Richards, which have seen you an inmate of this house, you have done your duty. Desiring to connect some little service to you with this occasion, I considered how I could best effect that object, and I also advised with my sister Mrs. —"

"Chick," interposed the gentleman of that name.

"Oh, hush, if you *please*!" said Miss Tox.

"I was about to say to you, Richards," resumed Mr. Dombey, with an appalling glance at Mr. John, "that I was further assisted in my decision by the recollection of a conversation I held with your husband in this room, on the occasion of your being hired, when he disclosed to me the melancholy fact that your family, himself at the head, were sunk and steeped in ignorance."

Richards quailed under the magnificence of the reproach.

"I am far from being friendly," pursued Mr. Dombey, "to what is called, by persons of levelling sentiments, general education. But it is necessary that the inferior classes should continue to be taught to know their position, and to conduct themselves properly. So far I approve of schools. Having the power of nominating a child on the foundation of an ancient establishment, called (from a worshipful company) the Charitable Grinders; where not only is a wholesome education bestowed upon the

scholars, but where a dress and badge is likewise provided for them; I have (first communicating, through Mrs. Chick, with your family) nominated your eldest son to an existing vacancy; and he has this-day, I am informed, assumed the habit. The number of her son, I believe," said Mr. Dombey, turning to his sister, and speaking of the child as if he were a hackney coach, "is one hundred and forty-seven. Louisa, you can tell her."

"One hundred and forty-seven," said Mrs. Chick. "The dress, Richards, is a nice, warm, blue baize tailed coat and cap, turned up with orange-coloured binding; red worsted stockings; and very strong leather small-clothes. One might wear the articles one's self," said Mrs. Chick with enthusiasm, "and be grateful."

"There, Richards!" said Miss Tox. "Now, indeed, you *may* be proud. The Charitable Grinders!"

"I am sure I am very much obliged, sir," returned Richards faintly, "and take it very kind: that you should remember my little ones." At the same time a vision of Biler as a Charitable Grinder, with his very small legs encased in the serviceable clothing described by Mrs. Chick, swam before Richards's eyes, and made them water.

"I am very glad to see you have so much feeling, Richards," said Miss Tox.

"It makes one almost hope, it really does," said Mrs. Chick, who prided herself on taking trustful views of human nature, "that there may yet be some faint spark of gratitude and right feeling in the world."

Richards deferred to these compliments by curtsying and murmuring her thanks; but finding it quite impossible to recover her spirits from the disorder into which they had been thrown by the image of her son in his precocious nether garments, she gradually approached the door, and was heartily relieved to escape by it.

Such temporary indications of a partial thaw as had appeared with her, vanished with her; and the frost set in again, as cold and hard as ever. Mr. Chick was twice heard to hum a tune at the bottom of the table, but on both occasions it was a fragment of the Dead March in Saul. The party seemed to get colder and colder, and to be gradually resolving itself into a congealed and solid state, like the collation round which it was assembled. At length Mrs. Chick looked at Miss Tox, and Miss Tox returned the look, and they both rose and said it was really time to go. Mr. Dombey receiving this announcement with perfect equanimity, they

took leave of that gentleman, and presently departed under the protection of Mr. Chick; who, when they had turned their backs upon the house and left its master in his usual solitary state, put his hands in his pockets, threw himself back in the carriage, and whistled "With a hey ho chevy!" all through; conveying into his face, as he did so, an expression of such gloomy and terrible defiance, that Mrs. Chick dared not protest, or in any way molest him.

Richards, though she had little Paul on her lap, could not forget her own first-born. She felt it was ungrateful; but the influence of the day fell even on the Charitable Grinders, and she could hardly help regarding his pewter badge, number one hundred and forty-seven, as, somehow, a part of its formality and sternness. She spoke, too, in the nursery, of his "blessed legs," and was again troubled by his spectre in uniform.

"I don't know what I wouldn't give," said Polly, "to see the poor little dear before he gets used to 'em."

"Why, then, I tell you what, Mrs. Richards," retorted Nipper, who had been admitted to her confidence, "see him and make your mind easy."

"Mr. Dombey wouldn't like it," said Polly.

"Oh wouldn't he, Mrs. Richards!" retorted Nipper, "he'd like it very much, I think, when he was asked."

"You wouldn't ask him, I suppose, at all?" said Polly.

"No, Mrs. Richards, quite contrary," returned Susan, "and them two inspectors, Tox and Chick, not intending to be on duty to-morrow, as I heard 'em say, me and Miss Floy will go along with you to-morrow morning, and welcome, Mrs. Richards, if you like, for we may as well walk there as up and down a street, and better too."

Polly rejected the idea pretty stoutly at first; but by little and little she began to entertain it, as she entertained more and more distinctly the forbidden pictures of her children and her own home. At length, arguing that there could be no great harm in calling for a moment at the door, she yielded to the Nipper proposition.

The matter being settled thus, little Paul began to cry most piteously, as if he had a foreboding that no good would come of it.

"What's the matter with the child?" asked Susan.

"He's cold, I think," said Polly, walking with him to and fro, and hushing him.

It was a bleak autumnal afternoon indeed;

and as she walked, and hushed, and, glancing through the dreary windows, pressed the little fellow closer to her breast, the withered leaves came showering down.

CHAPTER VI.

PAUL'S SECOND DEPRIVATION.

POLLY was beset by so many misgivings in the morning, that, but for the incessant promptings of her black-eyed companion, she would have abandoned all thoughts of the expedition, and formally petitioned for leave to see number one hundred and forty-seven under the awful shadow of Mr. Dombey's roof. But Susan, who was personally disposed in favour of the excursion, and who (like Tony Lumpkin), if she could bear the disappointments of other people with tolerable fortitude, could not abide to disappoint herself, threw so many ingenious doubts in the way of this second thought, and stimulated the original intention with so many ingenious arguments, that almost as soon as Mr. Dombey's stately back was turned, and that gentleman was pursuing his daily road towards the City, his unconscious son was on his way to Staggs's Gardens.

This euphonious locality was situated in a suburb, known by the inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens by the name of Camberling Town; a designation which the Stranger's Map of London, as printed (with a view to pleasant and commodious reference) on pocket-handkerchiefs, condenses, with some show of reason, into Camden Town. Hither the two nurses bent their steps, accompanied by their charges; Richards carrying Paul, of course, and Susan leading little Florence by the hand, and giving her such jerks and pokes, from time to time, as she considered it wholesome to administer.

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsyturvy at the bottom of a steep, unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and

rustured in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures in the most unlikely situations; carcasses of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.

But, as yet, the neighbourhood was shy to own the Railroad. One or two bold speculators had projected streets; and one had built a little, but had stopped among the mud and ashes to consider farther of it. A brand-new tavern, redolent of fresh mortar and size, and fronting nothing at all, had taken for its sign the Railway Arms; but that might be rash enterprise—and then it hoped to sell drink to the workmen. So, the Excavators' House of Call had sprung up from a beer-shop; and the old-established Ham and Beef Shop had become the Railway Eating House, with a roast leg of pork daily, through interested motives of a similar immediate and popular description. Lodging-house keepers were favourable in like manner; and for the like reasons were not to be trusted. The general belief was very slow. There were frouzy fields, and cow-houses, and dunghills, and dust-heaps, and ditches, and gardens, and summer-houses, and carpet-beating grounds at the very door of the railway. Little tumuli of oyster shells in the oyster season, and of lobster shells in the lobster season, and of broken crockery and faded cabbage-leaves in all seasons, encroached upon its high places. Posts, and rails, and old cautions to trespassers, and backs of mean houses, and patches of wretched vegetation stared it out of countenance. No-

thing was the better for it, or thought of being so. If the miserable waste ground lying near it could have laughed, it would have laughed it to scorn, like many of the miserable neighbours.

Staggs's Gardens was uncommonly incredulous. It was a little row of houses, with little squalid patches of ground before them, fenced off with old doors, barrel staves, scraps of tarpaulin, and dead bushes; with bottomless tin kettles and exhausted iron fenders thrust into the gaps. Here, the Staggs's Gardeners trained scarlet beans, kept fowls and rabbits, erected rotten summer-houses (one was an old boat), dried clothes, and smoked pipes. Some were of opinion that Staggs's Gardens derived its name from a deceased capitalist, one Mr. Staggs, who had built it for his delectation. Others, who had a natural taste for the country, held that it dated from those rural times when the antlered herd, under the familiar denomination of Staggses, had resorted to its shady precincts. Be this as it may, Staggs's Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove not to be withered by railroads; and so confident were they generally of its long outliving any such ridiculous inventions, that the master chimney-sweeper at the corner, who was understood to take the lead in the local politics of the Gardens, had publicly declared that on the occasion of the railroad opening, if ever it did open, two of his boys should ascend the flues of his dwelling, with instructions to hail the failure with derisive cheers from the chimney-pots.

To this unhallowed spot, the very name of which had hitherto been carefully concealed from Mr. Dombey by his sister, was little Paul now borne by Fate and Richards.

"That's my house, Susan," said Polly, pointing it out.

"Is it, indeed, Mrs. Richards?" said Susan condescendingly.

"And there's my sister Jemima at the door, I do declare," cried Polly, "with my own sweet precious baby in her arms!"

The sight added such an extensive pair of wings to Polly's impatience, that she set off down the Gardens at a run, and bouncing on Jemima, changed babies with her in a twinkling; to the utter astonishment of that young damsel, on whom the heir of the Dombeyes seemed to have fallen from the clouds.

"Why, Polly!" cried Jemima. "You! what a turn you *have* given me! who'd have thought it? come along in, Polly! How well you do look to be sure! The children will go half wild to see you, Polly, that they will."

That they did, if one might judge from the

noise they made, and the way in which they dashed at Polly and dragged her to a low chair in the chimney-corner, where her own honest apple face became immediately the centre of a bunch of smaller pippins, all laying their rosy cheeks close to it, and all evidently the growth of the same tree. As to Polly, she was full as noisy and vehement as the children; and it was not until she was quite out of breath, and her hair was hanging all about her flushed face, and her new christening attire was very much dishevelled, that any pause took place in the confusion. Even then, the smallest Toodle but one remained in her lap, holding on tight with both arms round her neck; while the smallest Toodle but two mounted on the back of the chair, and made desperate efforts, with one leg in the air, to kiss her round the corner.

"Look! there's a pretty little lady come to see you," said Polly; "and see how quiet *she* is! What a beautiful little lady, ain't she?"

This reference to Florence, who had been standing by the door not unobservant of what passed, directed the attention of the younger branches towards her; and had likewise the happy effect of leading to the formal recognition of Miss Nipper, who was not quite free from a misgiving that she had been already slighted.

"Oh, do come in and sit down a minute, Susan, please," said Polly. "This is my sister Jemima, this is. Jemima, I don't know what I should ever do with myself, if it wasn't for Susan Nipper; I shouldn't be here now but for her."

"Oh, do sit down, Miss Nipper, if you please," quoth Jemima.

Susan took the extreme corner of a chair, with a stately and ceremonious aspect.

"I never was so glad to see anybody in all my life; now really, I never was, Miss Nipper," said Jemima.

Susan relaxing, took a little more of the chair, and smiled graciously.

"Do untie your bonnet strings and make yourself at home, Miss Nipper, please," entreated Jemima. "I am afraid it's a poorer place than you're used to; but you'll make allowances, I'm sure."

The black-eyed was so softened by this deferential behaviour, that she caught up little Miss Toodle, who was running past, and took her to Banbury Cross immediately.

"But where's my pretty boy?" said Polly. "My poor fellow? I came all this way to see him in his new clothes."

"Ah, what a pity!" cried Jemima. "He'll

break his heart when he hears his mother has been here. He's at school, Polly."

"Gone already!"

"Yes. He went for the first time yesterday, for fear he should lose any learning. But it's half-holiday, Polly: if you could only stop till he comes home—you and Miss Nipper, least-ways," said Jemima, mindful in good time of the dignity of the black-eyed.

"And how does he look, Jemima, bless him?" faltered Polly.

"Well, really he don't look so bad as you'd suppose," returned Jemima.

"Ah!" said Polly with emotion, "I knew his legs must be too short."

"His legs *is* short," returned Jemima; "especially behind; but they'll get longer, Polly, every day."

It was a slow, prospective kind of consolation; but the cheerfulness and good-nature with which it was administered gave it a value it did not intrinsically possess. After a moment's silence, Polly asked, in a more sprightly manner:

"And where's father, Jemima dear?"—for by that patriarchal appellation Mr. Toodle was generally known in the family.

"There again!" said Jemima. "What a pity! Father took his dinner with him this morning, and isn't coming home till night. But he's always talking of you, Polly, and telling the children about you; and is the peaceablest, patientest, best-temperdest soul in the world, as he always was and will be!"

"Thankee, Jemima," cried the simple Polly; delighted by the speech, and disappointed by the absence.

"Oh, you needn't thank me, Polly," said her sister, giving her a sound kiss upon the cheek, and then dancing little Paul cheerfully. "I say the same of you sometimes, and think it too."

In spite of the double disappointment, it was impossible to regard in the light of a failure a visit which was greeted with such a reception; so the sisters talked hopefully about family matters, and about Biler, and about all his brothers and sisters: while the black-eyed, having performed several journeys to Banbury Cross and back, took sharp note of the furniture, the Dutch clock, the cupboard, the castle on the mantel-piece with red and green windows in it, susceptible of illumination by a candle-end within; and the pair of small black velvet kittens, each with a lady's reticule in its mouth; regarded by the Staggs's Gardeners as prodigies of imitative art. The conversation soon becoming general, lest the black-eyed should go off at score and turn sarcastic, that young lady

related to Jemima a summary of everything she knew concerning Mr. Dombey, his prospects, family, pursuits, and character. Also an exact inventory of her personal wardrobe, and some account of her principal relations and friends. Having relieved her mind of these disclosures, she partook of shrimps and porter, and evinced a disposition to swear eternal friendship.

Little Florence herself was not behindhand in improving the occasion; for, being conducted forth by the young Toodles to inspect some toadstools and other curiosities of the Gardens, she entered with them, heart and soul, on the formation of a temporary breakwater across a small green pool that had collected in a corner. She was still busily engaged in that labour when sought and found by Susan; who, such was her sense of duty even under the humanising influence of shrimps, delivered a moral address to her (punctuated with thumps) on her degenerate nature, while washing her face and hands; and predicted that she would bring the grey hairs of her family in general with sorrow to the grave. After some delay, occasioned by a pretty long confidential interview above-stairs, on pecuniary subjects, between Polly and Jemima, an interchange of babies was again effected—for Polly had all this time retained her own child, and Jemima little Paul—and the visitors took leave.

But first the young Toodles, victims of a pious fraud, were deluded into repairing in a body to a chandler's shop in the neighbourhood, for the ostensible purpose of spending a penny; and, when the coast was quite clear, Polly fled: Jemima calling after her that, if they could only go round towards the City Road on their way back, they would be sure to meet little Biler coming from school.

"Do you think that we might make time to go a little round in that direction, Susan?" inquired Polly when they halted to take breath.

"Why not, Mrs. Richards?" returned Susan.

"It's getting on towards our dinner-time you know," said Polly.

But lunch had rendered her companion more than indifferent to this grave consideration, so she allowed no weight to it, and they resolved to go "a little round."

Now, it happened that poor Biler's life had been, since yesterday morning, rendered weary by the costume of the Charitable Grinders. The youth of the streets could not endure it. No young vagabond could be brought to bear its contemplation for a moment, without throwing himself upon the unoffending wearer, and doing him a mischief. His social existence had been more like that of an early Christian than an

innocent child of the nineteenth century. He had been stoned in the streets. He had been overthrown into gutters; bespattered with mud; violently flattened against posts. Entire strangers to his person had lifted his yellow cap off his head, and cast it to the winds. His legs had not only undergone verbal criticisms and revilings, but had been handled and pinched. That very morning he had received a perfectly unsolicited black eye on his way to the Grinders' establishment, and had been punished for it by the master: a superannuated old Grinder of savage disposition, who had been appointed school-master because he didn't know anything, and wasn't fit for anything, and for whose cruel cane all chubby little boys had a perfect fascination.

Thus it fell out that Biler, on his way home, sought unfrequented paths; and slunk along by narrow passages and back-streets, to avoid his tormentors. Being compelled to emerge into the main road, his ill-fortune brought him at last where a small party of boys, headed by a ferocious young butcher, were lying in wait for any means of pleasurable excitement that might happen. These, finding a Charitable Grinder in the midst of them—unaccountably delivered over, as it were, into their hands—set up a general yell and rushed upon him.

But it so fell out, likewise, that, at the same time, Polly, looking hopelessly along the road before her, after a good hour's walk, had said it was no use going any farther, when suddenly she saw this sight. She no sooner saw it than, uttering a hasty exclamation, and giving Master Dombey to the black-eyed, she started to the rescue of her unhappy little son.

Surprises, like misfortunes, rarely come alone. The astonished Susan Nipper and her two young charges were rescued by the bystanders from under the very wheels of a passing carriage before they knew what had happened; and at that moment (it was market-day) a thundering alarm of "Mad Bull!" was raised.

With a wild confusion before her of people running up and down, and shouting, and wheels running over them, and boys fighting, and mad bulls coming up, and the nurse in the midst of all these dangers being torn to pieces, Florence screamed and ran. She ran till she was exhausted, urging Susan to do the same; and then, stopping and wringing her hands as she remembered they had left the other nurse behind, found, with a sensation of terror not to be described, that she was quite alone.

"Susan! Susan!" cried Florence, clapping her hands in the very ecstasy of her alarm. "Oh, where are they? where are they?"

"Where are they?" said an old woman, coming hobbling across as fast as she could from the opposite side of the way. "Why did you run away from 'em?"

"I was frightened," answered Florence. "I didn't know what I did. I thought they were with me. Where are they?"

The old woman took her by the wrist, and said, "I'll show you."

She was a very ugly old woman, with red rims round her eyes, and a mouth that mumbled and chattered of itself when she was not speaking. She was miserably dressed, and carried some skins over her arm. She seemed to have followed Florence some little way, at all events, for she had lost her breath; and this made her uglier still, as she stood trying to regain it: working her shrivelled yellow face and throat into all sorts of contortions.

Florence was afraid of her, and looked, hesitating, up the street, of which she had almost reached the bottom. It was a solitary place—more a back-road than a street—and there was no one in it but herself and the old woman.

"You needn't be frightened now," said the old woman, still holding her tight. "Come along with me."

"I—I don't know you. What's your name?" asked Florence.

"Mrs. Brown," said the old woman. "Good Mrs. Brown."

"Are they near here?" asked Florence, beginning to be led away.

"Susan ain't far off," said Good Mrs. Brown; "and the others are close to her."

"Is anybody hurt?" cried Florence.

"Not a bit of it," said Good Mrs. Brown.

The child shed tears of delight on hearing this, and accompanied the old woman willingly; though she could not help glancing at her face as they went along—particularly at that industrious mouth—and wondering whether Bad Mrs. Brown, if there were such a person, was at all like her.

They had not gone far, but had gone by some very uncomfortable places, such as brick-fields and tile-yards, when the old woman turned down a dirty lane, where the mud lay in deep black ruts in the middle of the road. She stopped before a shabby little house, as closely shut up as a house that was full of cracks and crevices could be. Opening the door with a key she took out of her bonnet, she pushed the child before her into a back-room, where there was a great heap of rags of different colours lying on the floor, a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust or cinders; but there was no furniture

at all, and the walls and ceiling were quite black.

The child became so terrified that she was stricken speechless, and looked as though about to swoon.

"Now don't be a young mule," said Good Mrs. Brown, reviving her with a shake. "I'm not a-going to hurt you. Sit upon the rags."

Florence obeyed her, holding out her folded hands in mute supplication.

"I'm not a-going to keep you, even, above an

hour," said Mrs. Brown. "D'ye understand what I say?"

The child, answered with great difficulty, "Yes."

"Then," said Good Mrs. Brown, taking her own seat on the bones, "don't vex me. If you don't, I tell you I won't hurt you. But if you do, I'll kill you. I could have you killed at any time—even if you was in your own bed at home. Now let's know who you are, and what you are, and all about it."



"FLORENCE OBEYED AS FAST AS HER TREMBLING HANDS WOULD ALLOW; KEEPING, ALL THE WHILE, A FRIGHTENED EYE ON MRS. BROWN."

The old woman's threats and promises; the dread of giving her offence; and the habit, unusual to a child, but almost natural to Florence now, of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, and feared, and hoped; enabled her to do this bidding, and to tell her little history, or what she knew of it. Mrs. Brown listened attentively until she had finished.

"So your name's Dombey, eh?" said Mrs. Brown.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I want that pretty frock, Miss Dombey," said Good Mrs. Brown, "and that little bonnet, and a petticoat or two, and anything else you can spare. Come! Take 'em off."

Florence obeyed as fast as her trembling hands would allow; keeping, all the while, a frightened eye on Mrs. Brown. When she had divested herself of all the articles of apparel mentioned by that lady, Mrs. B examined them.

at leisure; and seemed tolerably well satisfied with their quality and value.

"Humph!" she said, running her eyes over the child's slight figure, "I don't see anything else—except the shoes. I must have the shoes, Miss Dombey."

Poor little Florence took them off with equal alacrity, only too glad to have any more means of conciliation about her. The old woman then produced some wretched substitutes from the bottom of the heap of rags, which she turned up for that purpose; together with a girl's cloak, quite worn out and very old; and the crushed remains of a bonnet that had probably been picked up from some ditch or dunghill. In this dainty raiment she instructed Florence to dress herself; and, as such preparation seemed a prelude to her release, the child complied with increased readiness, if possible.

In hurriedly putting on the bonnet, if that may be called a bonnet which was more like a pad to carry loads on, she caught it in her hair, which grew luxuriantly, and could not immediately disentangle it. Good Mrs. Brown whipped out a large pair of scissors, and fell into an unaccountable state of excitement.

"Why couldn't you let me be," said Mrs. Brown, "when I was contented? You little fool!"

"I beg your pardon. I don't know what I have done," panted Florence. "I couldn't help it."

"Couldn't help it!" cried Mrs. Brown. "How do you expect I can help it? Why, Lord!" said the old woman, ruffling her curls with a furious pleasure, "anybody but me would have had 'em off first of all."

Florence was so relieved to find that it was only her hair, and not her head, which Mrs. Brown coveted, that she offered no resistance or entreaty, and merely raised her mild eyes towards the face of that good soul.

"If I hadn't once had a gal of my own—beyond seas now—that was proud of her hair," said Mrs. Brown, "I'd have had every lock of it. She's far away, she's far away. Oh! Oh!"

Mrs. Brown's was not a melodious cry, but, accompanied with a wild tossing up of her lean arms, it was full of passionate grief, and thrilled to the heart of Florence, whom it frightened more than ever. It had its part, perhaps, in saving her curls; for Mrs. Brown, after hovering about her with the scissors for some moments, like a new kind of butterfly, bade her hide them under the bonnet, and let no trace of them escape to tempt her. Having accomplished this victory over herself, Mrs. Brown re-

sumed her seat on the bones, and smoked a very short black pipe, mowing and mumbling all the time as if she were eating the stem.

When the pipe was smoked out, she gave the child a rabbit-skin to carry, that she might appear more like her ordinary companion; and told her that she was now going to lead her to a public street whence she could inquire her way to her friends. But she cautioned her, with threats of summary and deadly vengeance in case of disobedience, not to talk to strangers, nor to repair to her own home (which may have been too near for Mrs. Brown's convenience), but to her father's office in the City; also to wait at the street corner where she would be left until the clock struck three. These directions Mrs. Brown enforced with assurances that there would be potent eyes and ears in her employment cognizant of all she did; and these directions Florence promised faithfully and earnestly to observe.

At length Mrs. Brown, issuing forth, conducted her changed and ragged little friend through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys, which emerged, after a long time, upon a stable-yard, with a gateway at the end, whence the roar of a great thoroughfare made itself audible. Pointing out this gateway, and informing Florence that when the clock struck three she was to go to the left, Mrs. Brown, after making a parting grasp at her hair which seemed involuntary, and quite beyond her own control, told her she knew what to do, and bade her go and do it: remembering that she was watched.

With a lighter heart, but still sore afraid, Florence felt herself released, and tripped off to the corner. When she reached it, she looked back, and saw the head of Good Mrs. Brown peeping out of the low wooden passage where she had issued her parting injunctions; likewise the fist of Good Mrs. Brown shaking towards her. But though she often looked back afterwards—every minute, at least, in her nervous recollection of the old woman—she could not see her again.

Florence remained there, looking at the bustle in the street, and more and more bewildered by it; and, in the meanwhile, the clocks appeared to have made up their mind never to strike three any more. At last the steeples rang out three o'clock; there was one close by, so she couldn't be mistaken; and—after often looking over her shoulder, and often going a little way, and as often coming back again, lest the all-powerful spies of Mrs. Brown should take offence—she hurried off as fast as she could in

her slipshod shoes, holding the rabbit-skin tight in her hand.

All she knew of her father's offices was that they belonged to Dombey and Son, and that that was a great power belonging to the City. So she could only ask the way to Dombey and Son's in the City; and as she generally made inquiry of children—being afraid to ask grown people—she got very little satisfaction indeed. But, by dint of asking her way to the City after awhile, and dropping the rest of her inquiry for the present, she really did advance, by slow degrees, towards the heart of that great region which is governed by the terrible Lord Mayor.

Tired of walking, repulsed and pushed about, stunned by the noise and confusion, anxious for her brother and the nurses, terrified by what she had undergone, and the prospect of encountering her angry father in such an altered state; perplexed and frightened alike by what had passed, and what was passing, and what was yet before her; Florence went upon her weary way with tearful eyes, and once or twice could not help stopping to ease her bursting heart by crying bitterly. But few people noticed her at those times, in the garb she wore: or, if they did, believed that she was tutored to excite compassion, and passed on. Florence, too, called to her aid all the firmness and self-reliance of a character that her sad experience had prematurely formed and tried; and, keeping the end she had in view steadily before her, steadily pursued it.

It was full two hours later in the afternoon than when she had started on this strange adventure, when, escaping from the clash and clangour of a narrow street full of carts and waggons, she peeped into a kind of wharf or landing-place upon the river-side, where there were a great many packages, casks, and boxes strewn about; a large pair of wooden scales; and a little wooden house on wheels, outside of which, looking at the neighbouring masts and boats, a stout man stood whistling, with his pen behind his ear, and his hands in his pockets, as if his day's work were nearly done.

"Now then!" said this man, happening to turn round. "We haven't got anything for you, little girl. Be off!"

"If you please, is this the City?" asked the trembling daughter of the Dombeyes.

"Ah! it's the City. You know that well enough, I dare say. Be off! We haven't got anything for you."

"I don't want anything, thank you," was the timid answer. "Except to know the way to Dombey and Son's."

The man, who had been strolling carelessly towards her, seemed surprised by this reply, and, looking attentively in her face, rejoined:

"Why, what can *you* want with Dombey and Son's?"

"To know the way there, if you please."

The man looked at her yet more curiously, and rubbed the back of his head so hard in his wonderment, that he knocked his own hat off.

"Joe!" he called to another man—a labourer—as he picked it up and put it on again.

"Joe it is!" said Joe.

"Where's that young spark of Dombey's who's been watching the shipment of them goods?"

"Just gone by the t'other gate," said Joe.

"Call him back a minute."

Joe ran up an archway, bawling as he went, and very soon returned with a blithe-looking boy.

"You're Dombey's jockey, an't you?" said the first man.

"I'm in Dombey's House, Mr. Clark," returned the boy.

"Lookye here, then," said Mr. Clark.

Obedient to the indication of Mr. Clark's hand, the boy approached towards Florence, wondering, as well he might, what he had to do with her. But she, who had heard what passed, and who, besides the relief of so suddenly considering herself safe and at her journey's end, felt reassured beyond all measure by his lively youthful face and manner, ran eagerly up to him, leaving one of the slipshod shoes upon the ground, and caught his hand in both of hers.

"I am lost, if you please!" said Florence.

"Lost!" cried the boy.

"Yes, I was lost this morning, a long way from here—and I have had my clothes taken away since—and I am not dressed in my own now—and my name is Florence Dombey, my little brother's only sister—and, oh dear, dear, take care of me, if you please!" sobbed Florence, giving full vent to the childish feelings she had so long suppressed, and bursting into tears. At the same time, her miserable bonnet falling off, her hair came tumbling down about her face: moving to speechless admiration and commiseration young Walter, nephew of Solomon Gills, Ships' Instrument-maker in general.

Mr. Clark stood rapt in amazement: observing under his breath, *I never saw such a start on this wharf before*. Walter picked up the shoe, and put it on the little foot as the Prince in the story might have fitted Cinderella's slipper on. He hung the rabbit-skin over his left arm;

gave the right to Florence; and felt not to say like Richard Whittington—that is a tame comparison—but like St. George of England, with the dragon lying dead before him.

"Don't cry, Miss Dombey," said Walter in a transport of enthusiasm. "What a wonderful thing for me that I am here! You are as safe now as if you were guarded by a whole boat's crew of picked men from a man-of-war. Oh, don't cry!"

"I won't cry any more," said Florence. "I am only crying for joy."

"Crying for joy!" thought Walter; "and I'm the cause of it. Come along, Miss Dombey. There's the other shoe off now. Take mine, Miss Dombey."

"No, no, no," said Florence, checking him in the act of impetuously pulling off his own. "These do better. These do very well."

"Why, to be sure," said Walter, glancing at her foot; "mine are a mile too large. What am I thinking about? You never could walk in *mine*! Come along, Miss Dombey. Let me see the villain who will dare molest you now."

So Walter, looking immensely fierce, led off Florence, looking very happy; and they went arm-in-arm along the streets, perfectly indifferent to any astonishment that their appearance might or did excite by the way.

It was growing dark and foggy, and beginning to rain too; but they cared nothing for this: being both wholly absorbed in the late adventures of Florence, which she related with the innocent good faith and confidence of her years, while Walter listened as if, far from the mud and grease of Thames Street, they were rambling alone among the broad leaves and tall trees of some desert island in the tropics—as he very likely fancied, for the time, they were.

"Have we far to go?" asked Florence at last, lifting her eyes to her companion's face.

"Ah! By-the-bye," said Walter, stopping, "let me see; where are we? Oh! I know. But the offices are shut up now, Miss Dombey. There's nobody there. Mr. Dombey has gone home long ago. I suppose we must go home too? Or, stay. Suppose I take you to my uncle's, where I live—it's very near here—and go to your house in a coach to tell them you are safe, and bring you back some clothes. Won't that be best?"

"I think so," answered Florence. "Don't you? What do you think?"

As they stood deliberating in the street, a man passed them, who glanced quickly at Walter as he went by, as if he recognised him; but

seeming to correct that first impression, he passed on without stopping.

"Why, I think it's Mr. Carker," said Walter. "Carker in our House. Not Carker our manager, Miss Dombey—the other Carker; the junior. Halloo! Mr. Carker!"

"Is that Walter Gay?" said the other, stopping and returning. "I couldn't believe it, with such a strange companion."

As he stood near a lamp, listening with surprise to Walter's hurried explanation, he presented a remarkable contrast to the two youthful figures arm-in-arm before him. He was not old, but his hair was white; his body was bent, or bowed, as if by the weight of some great trouble; and there were deep lines in his worn and melancholy face. The fire of his eyes, the expression of his features, the very voice in which he spoke, were all subdued and quenched, as if the spirit within him lay in ashes. He was respectfully, though very plainly, dressed in black; but his clothes, moulded to the general character of his figure, seemed to shrink and abase themselves upon him, and to join in the sorrowful solicitation which the whole man from head to foot expressed, to be left unnoticed, and alone in his humility.

And yet his interest in youth and hopefulness was not extinguished with the other embers of his soul, for he watched the boy's earnest countenance as he spoke with unusual sympathy, though with an inexplicable show of trouble and compassion, which escaped into his looks, however hard he strove to hold it prisoner. When Walter, in conclusion, put to him the question he had put to Florence, he still stood glancing at him with the same expression, as if he read some fate upon his face, mournfully at variance with its present brightness.

"What do you advise, Mr. Carker?" said Walter, smiling. "You always give me good advice, you know, when you *do* speak to me. That's not often, though."

"I think your own idea is the best," he answered: looking from Florence to Walter, and back again.

"Mr. Carker," said Walter, brightening with a generous thought, "come! Here's a chance for you. Go you to Mr. Dombey's, and be the messenger of good news. It may do you some good, sir. I'll remain at home. You shall go."

"I!" returned the other.

"Yes. Why not, Mr. Carker?" said the boy.

He merely shook him by the hand in answer; he seemed in a manner ashamed and afraid even

to do that; and bidding him good night, and advising him to make haste, turned away.

"Come, Miss Dombey," said Walter, looking after him as they turned away also, "we'll go to my uncle's as quick as we can. Did you ever hear Mr. Dombey speak of Mr. Carker, the junior, Miss Florence?"

"No," returned the child mildly, "I don't often hear papa speak."

"Ah! true! more shame for him," thought Walter. After a minute's pause, during which he had been looking down upon the gentle, patient little face moving on at his side, he bestirred himself with his accustomed boyish animation and restlessness to change the subject; and one of the unfortunate shoes coming off again opportunely, proposed to carry Florence to his uncle's in his arms. Florence, though very tired, laughingly declined the proposal, lest he should let her fall; and as they were already near the Wooden Midshipman, and as Walter went on to cite various precedents, from shipwrecks and other moving accidents, where younger boys than he had triumphantly rescued and carried off older girls than Florence, they were still in full conversation about it when they arrived at the instrument-maker's door.

"Halloa, Uncle Sol!" cried Walter, bursting into the shop, and speaking incoherently and out of breath, from that time forth, for the rest of the evening. "Here's a wonderful adventure! Here's Mr. Dombey's daughter lost in the streets, and robbed of her clothes by an old witch of a woman—found by me—brought home to our parlour to rest—look here!"

"Good Heaven!" said Uncle Sol, starting back against his favourite compass-case. "It can't be! Well, I—"

"No, nor anybody else," said Walter, anticipating the rest. "Nobody would, nobody could, you know. Here! just help me lift the little sofa near the fire, will you, Uncle Sol?—take care of the plates—cut some dinner for her, will you, uncle?—throw those shoes under the grate, Miss Florence—put your feet on the fender to dry—how damp they are!—here's an adventure, uncle, eh?—God bless my soul, how hot I am!"

Solomon Gills was quite as hot, by sympathy, and in excessive bewilderment. He patted Florence's head, pressed her to eat, pressed her to drink, rubbed the soles of her feet with his pocket-handkerchief heated at the fire, followed his locomotive nephew with his eyes and ears, and had no clear perception of anything except that he was being constantly knocked against and tumbled over by that excited young gentle-

man, as he darted about the room attempting to accomplish twenty things at once, and doing nothing at all.

"Here, wait a minute, uncle," he continued, catching up a candle, "till I run up-stairs and get another jacket on, and then I'll be off. I say, uncle, isn't this an adventure?"

"My dear boy," said Solomon, who, with his spectacles on his forehead and the great chronometer in his pocket, was incessantly oscillating between Florence on the sofa and his nephew in all parts of the parlour, "it's the most extraordinary——"

"No, but do, uncle, please—do, Miss Florence—dinner, you know, uncle."

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Solomon, cutting instantly into a leg of mutton, as if he were catering for a giant. "I'll take care of her, Wally! I understand. Pretty dear! Famished, of course. You go and get ready. Lord bless me! Sir Richard Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London!"

Walter was not very long in mounting to his lofty garret and descending from it, but in the meantime Florence, overcome by fatigue, had sunk into a doze before the fire. The short interval of quiet, though only a few minutes in duration, enabled Solomon Gills so far to collect his wits as to make some little arrangements for her comfort, and to darken the room, and to screen her from the blaze. Thus, when the boy returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

"That's capital!" he whispered, giving Solomon such a hug that it squeezed a new expression into his face. "Now I'm off. I'll just take a crust of bread with me, for I'm very hungry—and—don't wake her, Uncle Sol."

"No, no," said Solomon. "Pretty child!"

"Pretty, indeed!" cried Walter. "I never saw such a face, Uncle Sol. Now I'm off."

"That's right," said Solomon, greatly relieved.

"I say, Uncle Sol," cried Walter, putting his face in at the door.

"Here he is again!" said Solomon.

"How does she look now?"

"Quite happy," said Solomon.

"That's famous! Now I'm off."

"I hope you are," said Solomon to himself.

"I say, Uncle Sol," cried Walter, reappearing at the door.

"Here he is again!" said Solomon.

"We met Mr. Carker the junior in the street, queerer than ever. He bade me good-bye, but came behind us here—there's an odd thing!—for when we reached the shop-door, I looked round, and saw him going quietly away, like a

servant who had seen me home, or a faithful dog. How does she look now, uncle?"

"Pretty much the same as before, Wally," replied Uncle Sol.

"That's right. Now I am off!"

And this time he really was: and Solomon Gills, with no appetite for dinner, sat on the opposite side of the fire, watching Florence in her slumber, building a great many airy castles of the most fantastic architecture; and looking in the dim shade, and in the close vicinity of all the instruments, like a magician disguised in a Welsh wig and a suit of coffee colour, who held the child in an enchanted sleep.

In the meantime Walter proceeded towards Mr. Dombey's house at a pace seldom achieved by a hack horse from the stand; and yet with his head out of window every two or three minutes, in impatient remonstrance with the driver. Arriving at his journey's end, he leaped out, and breathlessly announcing his errand to the servant, followed him straight into the library, where there was a great confusion of tongues, and where Mr. Dombey, his sister, and Miss Tox, Richards, and Nipper, were all congregated together.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, sir," said Walter, rushing up to him, "but I'm happy to say it's all right, sir. Miss Dombey's found."

The boy with his open face, and flowing hair, and sparkling eyes, panting with pleasure and excitement, was wonderfully opposed to Mr. Dombey, as he sat confronting him in his library chair.

"I told you, Louisa, that she would certainly be found," said Mr. Dombey, looking slightly over his shoulder at that lady, who wept in company with Miss Tox. "Let the servants know that no further steps are necessary. This boy, who brings the information, is young Gay, from the office. How was my daughter found, sir? I know how she was lost." Here he looked majestically at Richards. "But how was she found? Who found her?"

"Why, I believe I found Miss Dombey, sir," said Walter modestly; "at least, I don't know that I can claim the merit of having exactly found her, sir, but I was the fortunate instrument of—"

"What do you mean, sir," interrupted Mr. Dombey, regarding the boy's evident pride and pleasure in his share of the transaction with an instinctive dislike, "by not having exactly found my daughter, and by being a fortunate instrument? Be plain and coherent, if you please."

It was quite out of Walter's power to be coherent; but he rendered himself as explanatory

as he could in his breathless state, and stated why he had come alone.

"You hear this, girl?" said Mr. Dombey sternly to the black-eyed. "Take what is necessary, and return immediately with this young man to fetch Miss Florence home. Gay, you will be rewarded to-morrow."

"Oh! thank you, sir," said Walter. "You are very kind. I'm sure I was not thinking of any reward, sir."

"You are a boy," said Mr. Dombey, suddenly and almost fiercely; "and what you think of, or affect to think of, is of little consequence. You have done well, sir. Don't undo it. Louisa, please to give the lad some wine."

Mr. Dombey's glance followed Walter Gay with sharp disfavour as he left the room under the pilotage of Mrs. Chick; and it may be that his mind's eye followed him with no greater relish as he rode back to his uncle's with Miss Susan Nipper.

There they found that Florence, much refreshed by sleep, had dined, and greatly improved the acquaintance of Solomon Gills, with whom she was on terms of perfect confidence and ease. The black-eyed (who had cried so much that she might now be called the red-eyed, and who was very silent and depressed) caught her in her arms without a word of contradiction or reproach, and made a very hysterical meeting of it. Then converting the parlour, for the nonce, into a private tiring-room, she dressed her, with great care, in proper clothes; and presently led her forth, as like a Dombey as her natural disqualifications admitted of her being made.

"Good night!" said Florence, running up to Solomon. "You have been very good to me."

Old Sol was quite delighted, and kissed her like her grandfather.

"Good night, Walter! Good-bye!" said Florence.

"Good-bye!" said Walter, giving both his hands.

"I'll never forget you," pursued Florence. "No! indeed I never will. Good-bye, Walter!"

In the innocence of her grateful heart, the child lifted up her face to his. Walter, bending down his own, raised it again, all red and burning; and looked at Uncle Sol quite sheepishly.

"Where's Walter?" "Good night, Walter!" "Good-bye, Walter!" "Shake hands once more, Walter!" This was still Florence's cry, after she was shut up with her little maid in the coach. And when the coach at length moved off, Walter on the door-step gaily returned the waving of her handkerchief, while the Wooden Midshipman behind him seemed, like him-

intent upon that coach alone, excluding all the other passing coaches from his observation.

In good time Mr. Dombey's mansion was gained again, and again there was a noise of tongues in the library. Again, too, the coach was ordered to wait—"for Mrs. Richards," one of Susan's fellow-servants ominously whispered, as she passed with Florence.

The entrance of the lost child made a slight sensation, but not much. Mr. Dombey, who had never found her, kissed her once upon the forehead, and cautioned her not to run away again, or wander anywhere with treacherous attendants. Mrs. Chick stopped in her lamentations on the corruption of human nature, even when beckoned to the paths of virtue by a Charitable Grinder; and received her with a welcome something short of the reception due to none but perfect Dombey. Miss Tox regulated her feelings by the models before her. Richards, the culprit Richards, alone poured out her heart in broken words of welcome, and bowed herself over the little wandering head as if she really loved it.

"Ah, Richards!" said Mrs. Chick with a sigh. "It would have been much more satisfactory to those who wish to think well of their fellow-creatures, and much more becoming in you, if you had shown some proper feeling, in time, for the little child that is now going to be prematurely deprived of its natural nourishment."

"Cut off," said Miss Tox in a plaintive whisper, "from one common fountain!"

"If it was *my* ungrateful case," said Mrs. Chick solemnly, "and I had *your* reflections, Richards, I should feel as if the Charitable Grinders' dress would blight my child, and the education choke him."

For the matter of that—but Mrs. Chick didn't know it—he had been pretty well blighted by the dress already; and as to the education, even its retributive effect might be produced in time, for it was a storm of sobs and blows.

"Louisa!" said Mr. Dombey. "It is not necessary to prolong these observations. The woman is discharged and paid. You leave this house, Richards, for taking my son—my son," said Mr. Dombey, emphatically repeating these two words, "into haunts and into society which are not to be thought of without a shudder. As to the accident which befell Miss Florence this morning, I regard that as, in one great sense, a happy and fortunate circumstance; inasmuch as, but for that occurrence, I never could have known—and from your own lips too—of what you had been guilty. I think, Louisa, the other

nurse, the young person,"—here Miss Nipper sobbed aloud,—“being so much younger, and necessarily influenced by Paul's nurse, may remain. Have the goodness to direct that this woman's coach is paid to”—Mr. Dombey stopped and winced—"to Staggs's Gardens."

Polly moved towards the door, with Florence holding to her dress, and crying to her in the most pathetic manner not to go away. It was a dagger in the haughty father's heart, an arrow in his brain, to see how the flesh and blood he could not disown clung to this obscure stranger, and he sitting by. Not that he cared to whom his daughter turned, or from whom turned away. The swift sharp agony struck through him as he thought of what his son might do.

His son cried lustily that night, at all events. Sooth to say, poor Paul had better reason for his tears than sons of that age often have, for he had lost his second mother—his first, so far as he knew—by a stroke as sudden as that natural affliction which had darkened the beginning of his life. At the same blow, his sister too, who cried herself to sleep so mournfully, had lost as good and true a friend. But that is quite beside the question. Let us waste no words about it.

CHAPTER VII.

A BIRD'S-EYE GLIMPSE OF MISS TOX'S DWELLING-PLACE; ALSO OF THE STATE OF MISS TOX'S AFFECTIONS.

MISS TOX inhabited a dark little house that had been squeezed, at some remote period of English History, into a fashionable neighbourhood at the West-end of the town, where it stood, in the shade like a poor relation of the great street round the corner, coldly looked down upon by mighty mansions. It was not exactly in a court, and it was not exactly in a yard; but it was in the dullest of No-Thoroughfares, rendered anxious and haggard by distant double knocks. The name of this retirement, where grass grew between the chinks in the stone pavement, was Princess's Place; and in Princess's Place was Princess's Chapel, with a tinkling bell, where sometimes as many as five-and-twenty people attended service on a Sunday. The Princess's Arms was also there, and much resorted to by splendid footmen. A sedan-chair was kept inside the railing before the Princess's Arms, but it had never come out within the memory of

man; and, on fine mornings, the top of every rail (there are eight-and-forty, as Miss Tox had often counted) was decorated with a pewter pot.

There was another private house besides Miss Tox's in Princess's Place: not to mention an immense pair of gates, with an immense pair of lion-headed knockers on them, which were never opened by any chance, and were supposed to constitute a disused entrance to somebody's stables. Indeed, there was a smack of stabling in the air of Princess's Place; and Miss Tox's bedroom (which was at the back) commanded a vista of Mews, where hostlers, at whatever sort of work engaged, were continually accompanying themselves with effervescent noises; and where the most domestic and confidential garments of coachmen and their wives and families usually hung, like Macbeth's banners, on the outward walls.

At this other private house in Princess's Place, tenanted by a retired butler who had married a housekeeper, apartments were let, furnished, to a single gentleman, to wit, a wooden-featured, blue-faced Major, with his eyes starting out of his head, in whom Miss Tox recognised, as she herself expressed it, "something so truly military;" and between whom and herself an occasional interchange of newspapers and pamphlets, and such Platonic dalliance, was effected through the medium of a dark servant of the major's, whom Miss Tox was quite content to classify as a "native," without connecting him with any geographical idea whatever.

Perhaps there never was a smaller entry and staircase than the entry and staircase of Miss Tox's house. Perhaps, taken altogether, from top to bottom, it was the most inconvenient little house in England, and the crookedest; but then, Miss Tox said, what a situation! There was very little daylight to be got there in the winter: no sun at the best of times: air was out of the question, and traffic was walled out. Still Miss Tox said, think of the situation! So said the blue-faced major, whose eyes were starting out of his head: who gloried in Princess's Place: and who delighted to turn the conversation at his club, whenever he could, to something connected with some of the great people in the great street round the corner, that he might have the satisfaction of saying they were his neighbours.

The dingy tenement inhabited by Miss Tox was her own; having been devised and bequeathed to her by the deceased owner of the fishy eye in the locket, of whom a miniature portrait, with a powdered head and a pigtail,

balanced the kettle-holder on opposite sides of the parlour fire-place. The greater part of the furniture was of the powdered head and pigtail period: comprising a plate-warmer, always languishing and sprawling its four attenuated bow legs in somebody's way; and an obsolete harpsichord, illuminated round the maker's name with a painted garland of sweet peas.

Although Major Bagstock had arrived at what is called, in polite literature, the grand meridian of life, and was proceeding on his journey downhill with hardly any throat, and a very rigid pair of jaw-bones, and long-flapped elephantine ears, and his eyes and complexion in the state of artificial excitement already mentioned, he was mightily proud of awakening an interest in Miss Tox, and tickled his vanity with the fiction that she was a splendid woman who had her eye on him. This he had several times hinted at the club: in connection with little jocularities, of which old Joe Bagstock, old Joey Bagstock, old J. Bagstock, old Josh Bagstock, or so forth, was the perpetual theme: it being, as it were, the major's stronghold and donjon-keep of light humour to be on the most familiar terms with his own name.

"Joey B., sir," the major would say, with a flourish of his walking-stick, "is worth a dozen of you. If you had a few more of the Bagstock breed among you, sir, you'd be none the worse for it. Old Joe, sir, needn't look far for a wife even now, if he was on the look out; but he's hard-hearted, sir, is Joe—he's tough, sir, tough, and de-vilish sly!" After such a declaration wheezing sounds would be heard; and the major's blue would deepen into purple, while his eyes strained and started convulsively.

Notwithstanding his very liberal laudation of himself, however, the major was selfish. It may be doubted whether there ever was a more entirely selfish person at heart; or at stomach is perhaps a better expression, seeing that he was more decidedly endowed with that latter organ than with the former. He had no idea of being overlooked or slighted by anybody; least of all had he the remotest comprehension of being overlooked and slighted by Miss Tox.

And yet, Miss Tox, as it appeared, forgot him—gradually forgot him. She began to forget him soon after her discovery of the Toodle family. She continued to forget him up to the time of the christening. She went on forgetting him with compound interest after that. Something or somebody had superseded him as a source of interest.

"Good morning, ma'am," said the major, meeting Miss Tox in Princess's Place, some

weeks after the changes chronicled in the last chapter.

"Good morning, sir," said Miss Tox; very coldly.

"Joe Bagstock, ma'am," observed the major with his usual gallantry, "has not had the happiness of bowing to you at your window for a considerable period. Joe has been hardly used, ma'am. His sun has been behind a cloud."

Miss Tox inclined her head; but very coldly indeed.

"Joe's luminary has been out of town, ma'am, perhaps?" inquired the major.

"I? out of town? Oh no, I have not been out of town," said Miss Tox. "I have been much engaged lately. My time is nearly all devoted to some very intimate friends. I am afraid I have none to spare, even now. Good morning, sir!"

As Miss Tox, with her most fascinating step and carriage, disappeared from Princess's Place, the major stood looking after her with a bluer face than ever: muttering and growling some not at all complimentary remarks.

"Why damme, sir," said the major, rolling his lobster eyes round and round Princess's Place, and apostrophizing its fragrant air, "six months ago, the woman loved the ground Josh Bagstock walked on. What's the meaning of it?"

The major decided, after some consideration, that it meant man-traps; that it meant plotting and snarling; that Miss Tox was digging pitfalls. "But you won't catch Joe, ma'am," said the major. "He's tough, ma'am, tough, is J. B. Tough, an' de-vilish sly!" over which reflection he chuckled for the rest of the day.

But still when that day and many other days were gone and past, it seemed that Miss Tox took no heed whatever of the major, and thought nothing at all about him. She had been wont, once upon a time, to look out at one of her little dark windows by accident, and blushing return the major's greeting; but now she never gave the major a chance, and cared nothing at all whether he looked over the way or not. Other changes had come to pass too. The major, standing in the shade of his own apartment, could make out that an air of greater smartness had recently come over Miss Tox's house; that a new cage with gilded wires had been provided for the ancient little canary bird; that divers ornaments, cut out of coloured cardboards and paper, seemed to decorate the chimney-piece and tiles; that a plant or two had suddenly sprang up in the windows; that Miss Tox occasionally practised on the harpsichord, whose garland of sweet peas was always dis-

played ostentatiously; crowned with the Copenhagen and Bird Waltzes in a music-book of Miss Tox's own copying.

Over and above all this, Miss Tox had long been dressed with uncommon care and elegance in slight mourning. But this helped the major out of his difficulty; and he determined within himself that she had come into a small legacy, and grown proud.

It was on the very next day after he had eased his mind by arriving at this decision, that the major, sitting at his breakfast, saw an apparition so tremendous and wonderful in Miss Tox's little drawing-room, that he remained for some time rooted to his chair; then, rushing into the next room, returned with a double-barrelled opera-glass, through which he surveyed it intently for some minutes.

"It's a Baby, sir," said the major, shutting up the glass again, "for fifty thousand pounds!"

The major couldn't forget it. He could do nothing but whistle, and stare to that extent, that his eyes, compared with what they now became, had been in former times quite cavernous and sunken. Day after day, two, three, four times a week, this baby reappeared. The major continued to stare and whistle. To all other intents and purposes he was alone in Princess's Place. Miss Tox had ceased to mind what he did. He might have been black as well as blue, and it would have been of no consequence to her.

The perseverance with which she walked out of Princess's Place to fetch this baby and its nurse, and walked back with them, and walked home with them again, and continually mounted guard over them; and the perseverance, with which she nursed it herself, and fed it, and played with it, and froze its young blood with airs upon the harpsichord; was extraordinary. At about the same period, too, she was seized with a passion for looking at a certain bracelet; also with a passion for looking at the moon, of which she would take long observations from her chamber window. But whatever she looked at; sun, moon, stars, or bracelet; she looked no more at the major. And the major whistled, and stared, and wondered, and dodged about his room, and could make nothing of it.

"You'll quite win my brother Paul's heart, and that's the truth, my dear," said Mrs. Chick one day.

Miss Tox turned pale.

"He grows more like Paul every day," said Mrs. Chick.

Miss Tox returned no other reply than by taking the little Paul in her arms, and making

his cockade perfectly flat and limp with her caresses.

"His mother, my dear," said Miss Tox, "whose acquaintance I was to have made through you, does he at all resemble her?"

"Not at all," returned Louisa.

"She was—she was pretty, I believe?" faltered Miss Tox.

"Why, poor dear Fanny was interesting," said Mrs. Chick after some judicial consideration. "Certainly interesting. She had not that air of commanding superiority which one would somehow expect, almost as a matter of course, to find in my brother's wife; nor had she that strength and vigour of mind which such a man requires."

Miss Tox heaved a deep sigh.

"But she was pleasing," said Mrs. Chick, "extremely so. And she meant!—oh dear; how well poor Fanny meant!"

"You angel!" cried Miss Tox to little Paul.

"You picture of your own papa!"

If the major could have known how many hopes and ventures, what a multitude of plans and speculations, rested on that baby head; and could have seen them hovering, in all their heterogeneous confusion and disorder, round the puckered cap of the unconscious little Paul; he might have stared indeed. Then would he have recognised, among the crowd, some few ambitious notes and beams belonging to Miss Tox; then would he perhaps have understood the nature of that lady's faltering investment in the Dombey Firm.

If the child himself could have awakened in the night, and seen, gathered about his cradle curtains, faint reflections of the dreams that other people had of him, they might have scared him, with good reason. But he slumbered on, alike unconscious of the kind intentions of Miss Tox, the wonder of the major, the early sorrows of his sister, and the sterner visions of his father; and innocent that any spot of earth contained a Dombey or a Son.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL'S FURTHER PROGRESS, GROWTH, AND CHARACTER.

BENEATH the watching and attentive eyes of Time—so far another Major—Paul's slumbers gradually changed. More and more light broke in upon them; distincter and distincter dreams disturbed them; an accumulating crowd of objects and impressions swarmed about his rest; and so he passed from babyhood to

childhood, and became a talking, walking, wondering Dombey.

On the downfall and banishment of Richards, the nursery may be said to have been put into commission; as a Public Department is sometimes, when no individual Atlas can be found to support it. The Commissioners were, of course, Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox: who devoted themselves to their duties with such astonishing ardour, that Major Bagstock had every day some new reminder of his being forsaken, while Mr. Chick, bereft of domestic supervision, cast himself upon the gay world, dined at clubs and coffee-houses, smelt of smoke on three distinct occasions, went to the play by himself, and, in short, loosened (as Mrs. Chick once told him) every social bond and moral obligation.

Yet, in spite of his early promise, at this vigilance and care could not make little Paul a thriving boy. Naturally delicate, perhaps, he pined and wasted after the dismissal of his nurse, and, for a long time, seemed but to wait his opportunity of gliding through their hands, and seeking his lost mother. This dangerous round in his steeple-chase towards manhood passed, he still found it very rough riding, and was grievously beset by all the obstacles in his course. Every tooth was a break-neck fence, and every pimple in the measles a stone wall to him. He was down in every fit of the hooping-cough, and rolled upon and crushed by a wholefield of small diseases, that came trooping in each other's heels to prevent his getting up again. Some bird of prey got into his throat instead of the thrush; and the very chickens, turning ferocious—if they have anything to do with that infant malady to which they lend the name—worried him like tiger-cats.

The chill of Paul's christening had struck home, perhaps, to some sensitive part of his nature, which could not recover itself in the cold shade of his father; but he was an unfortunate child from that day. Mrs. Wickam often said she never saw a dear so put up.

Mrs. Wickam was a waiter's life—which would seem equivalent to being another man's widow—whose application for an engagement in Mr. Dombey's service had been favourably considered, on account of the apparent impossibility of her having any followers or any one to follow; and who, from within day or two of Paul's sharp weaning, had been engaged as his nurse. Mrs. Wickam was an old woman, of a fair complexion, with her eyebrows always elevated, and her head always crooping; who was always ready to pity herself to be pitied, or to pity anybody else; and who had a sur-

prising natural gift of viewing all subjects in an utterly forlorn and pitiable light, and bringing dreadful precedents to bear upon them, and deriving the greatest consolation from the exercise of that talent.

It is hardly necessary to observe, that no touch of this quality ever reached the magnificent knowledge of Mr. Dombey. It would have been remarkable, indeed, if any had; when no one in the house—not even Mrs. Chick or Miss Tox—dared ever whisper to him that there had, on any one occasion, been the least reason for uneasiness in reference to little Paul. He had settled, within himself, that the child must necessarily pass through a certain routine of minor maladies, and that the sooner he did so the better. If he could have bought him off, or provided a substitute, as in the case of an unlucky drawing for the militia, he would have been glad to do so on liberal terms. But, as this was not feasible, he merely wondered, in his haughty manner, now and then, what Nature meant by it; and comforted himself with the reflection that there was another milestone passed upon the road, and that the great end of the journey lay so much the nearer. For the feeling uppermost in his mind, now and constantly intensifying, and increasing in it as Paul grew older, was impatience. Impatience for the time to come when his visions of their united consequence and grandeur would be triumphantly realised.

Some philosophers tell us that selfishness is at the root of our best loves and affections. Mr. Dombey's young child was, from the beginning, so distinctly important to him as a part of his own greatness, or (which is the same thing) of the greatness of Dombey and Son, that there is no doubt his parental affection might have been easily traced, like many a goodly superstructure of fair fame, to a very low foundation. But he loved his son with all the love he had. If there were a warm place in his frosty heart, his son occupied it; if its very hard surface could receive the impression of any image, the image of that son was there; though not so much as an infant, or as a boy, but as a grown man—the "Son" of the Firm. Therefore he was impatient to advance into the future, and to hurry over the intervening passages of his history. Therefore he had little or no anxiety about tem, in spite of his love; feeling as if the boy had a charmed life, and *must* become the man with whom he held such constant communication in his thoughts, and for whom he planned and projected, as for an existing reality, every day.

Thus Paul grew to be nearly five years old.

He was a pretty little fellow; though there was something wan and wistful in his small face, that gave occasion to many significant shakes of Mrs. Wickam's head, and many long-drawn inspirations of Mrs. Wickam's breath. His temper gave abundant promise of being imperious in after life; and he had as hopeful an apprehension of his own importance, and the rightful subservience of all other things and persons to it, as heart could desire. He was childish and sportive enough at times, and not of a sullen disposition; but he had a strange, old fashioned, thoughtful way, at other times, of sitting brooding in his miniature arm-chair, when he looked (and talked) like one of those terrible little Beings in the Fairy tales, who at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted. He would frequently be stricken with this precocious mood up-stairs in the nursery; and would sometimes lapse into it suddenly, exclaiming that he was tired: even while playing with Florence, or driving Miss Tox in single harness. But at no time did he fall into it so surely as when, his little chair being carried down into his father's room, he sat there with him after dinner, by the fire. They were the strangest pair, at such a time that ever fire-light shone upon. Mr. Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the blaze; his little image, with an old, old face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr. Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations. Mr. Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted.

On one of these occasions, when they had both been perfectly quiet for a long time, and Mr. Dombey only knew that the child was awake by occasionally glancing at his eye, where the bright fire was sparkling like a jewel, little Paul broke silence thus.

"Papa! what's money?"

The abrupt question had such immediate reference to the subject of Mr. Dombey's thoughts, that Mr. Dombey was quite disconcerted.

"What is money, Paul?" he answered. "Money?"

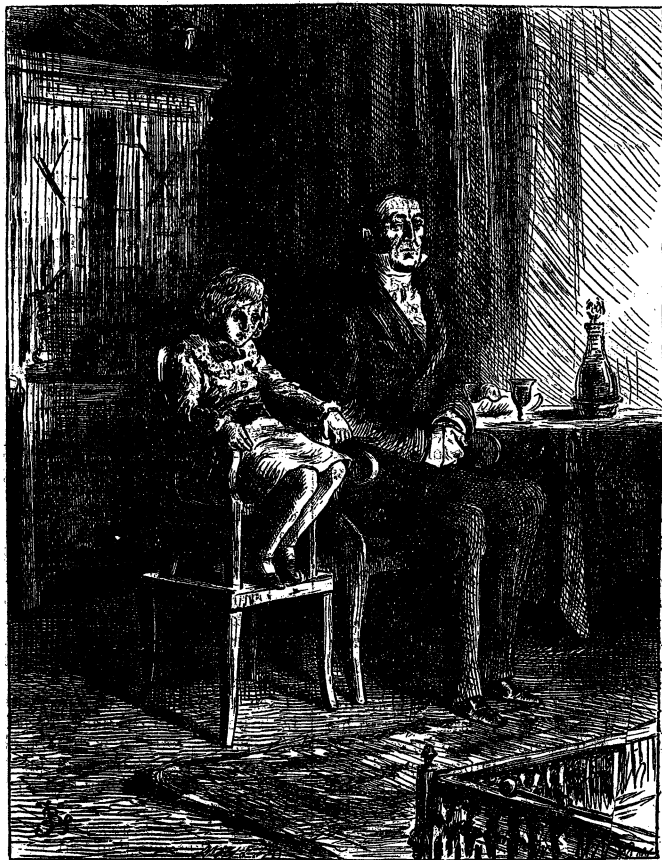
"Yes," said the child, laying his hands upon the elbows of his little chair, and turning the old face up towards Mr. Dombey's; "what is money?"

Mr. Dombey was in a difficulty. He would

have liked to give him some explanation involving the terms circulating medium, currency, depreciation of currency, paper, bullion, rates of exchange, value of precious metals in the market, and so forth; but looking down at the little chair, and seeing what a long way down it was,

he answered: "Gold, and silver, and copper. Guineas, shillings, halfpence. You know what they are?"

"Oh yes, I know what they are!" said Paul. "I don't mean that, papa. I mean what's money after all?"



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Heaven and Earth, how old his face was as he turned it up again towards his father's!

"What is money after all?" said Mr. Dombey, backing his chair a little, that he might the better gaze in sheer amazement at the presumptuous atom that propounded such an inquiry.

"I mean, papa, what can it do?" returned Paul, folding his arms (the were hardly long enough to fold), and looking at the fire, and up at him, and at the fire, and up at him again.

Mr. Dombey drew his chair back to its former place, and patted him on the head. "You'll

know better by-and-by, my man," he said. "Money can do anything." He took hold of the little hand, and beat it softly against one of his own, as he said so.

But Paul got his hand free as soon as he could; and rubbing it gently to and fro on the elbow of his chair, as if his wit were in the palm, and he were sharpening it—and looking at the fire again, as though the fire had been his adviser and prompter—repeated, after a short pause:

"Anything, papa?"

"Yes. Anything—almost," said Mr. Dombey.

"Anything means everything, don't it, papa?" asked his son, not observing, or possibly not understanding, the qualification.

"It includes it: yes," said Mr. Dombey.

"Why didn't money save me my mamma?" returned the child. "It isn't cruel, is it?"

"Cruel!" said Mr. Dombey, settling his neck-cloth, and seeming to resent the idea. "No. A good thing can't be cruel."

"If it's a good thing, and can do anything," said the little fellow thoughtfully, as he looked back at the fire, "I wonder why it didn't save me my mamma."

He didn't ask the question of his father this time. Perhaps he had seen, with a child's quickness, that it had already made his father uncomfortable. But he repeated the thought aloud, as if it were quite an old one to him, and had troubled him very much; and sat with his chin resting on his hand, still cogitating and looking for an explanation in the fire.

Mr. Dombey, having recovered from his surprise, not to say his alarm (for it was the very first occasion on which the child had ever broached the subject of his mother to him, though he had had him sitting by his side, in this same manner, evening after evening), expounded to him how that money, though a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever, could not keep people alive whose time was come to die; and how that we must all die, unfortunately, even in the City, though we were never so rich. But how that money caused us to be honoured, feared, respected, courted, and admired, and made us powerful and glorious in the eyes of all men; and how that it could, very often, even keep off death for a long time together. How, for example, it had secured to his mamma the services of Mr. Pilkins, by which he, Paul, had often profited himself; likewise of the great Doctor Parker Peps, whom he had never known. And how it could do all that could be done. This, with more to the same purpose, Mr. Dombey instilled into the mind of his son, who list-

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ened attentively, and seemed to understand the greater part of what was said to him.

"It can't make me strong and quite well, either, papa; can it?" asked Paul after a short silence: rubbing his tiny hands.

"Why, you *are* strong and quite well," returned Mr. Dombey. "Are you not?"

Oh! the age of the face that was turned up again, with an expression half of melancholy, half of slyness, on it!

"You are as strong and well as such little people usually are? Eh?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Florence is older than I am, but I'm not as strong and well as Florence, I know," returned the child; "but I believe that, when Florence was as little as me, she could play a great deal longer at a time without tiring herself. I am so tired sometimes," said little Paul, warming his hands, and looking in between the bars of the grate, as if some ghostly puppet-show were performing there, "and my bones ache so (Wickam says it's my bones), that I don't know what to do."

"Ay! But that's at night," said Mr. Dombey, drawing his own chair closer to his son's, and laying his hand gently on his back; "little people should be tired at night, for then they sleep well."

"Oh, it's not at night, papa," returned the child, "it's in the day; and I lie down in Florence's lap, and she sings to me. At night I dream about such cu-ri-ous things!"

And he went on warming his hands again, and thinking about them, like an old man or a young goblin.

Mr. Dombey was so astonished, and so uncomfortable, and so perfectly at a loss how to pursue the conversation, that he could only sit looking at his son by the light of the fire, with his hand resting on his back, as if it were detained there by some magnetic attraction. Once he advanced his other hand, and turned the contemplative face towards his own for a moment. But it sought the fire again as soon as he released it; and remained addressed towards the flickering blaze until the nurse appeared, to summon him to bed.

"I want Florence to come for me," said Paul.

"Won't you come with your poor nurse Wickam, Master Paul?" inquired that attendant with great pathos.

"No, I won't," replied Paul, composing himself in his arm-chair again, like the master of the house.

Invoking a blessing upon his innocence, Mrs. Wickam withdrew, and presently Florence appeared in her stead. The child immediately

started up with sudden readiness and animation, and raised towards his father, in bidding him good night, a countenance so much brighter, so much younger, and so much more childlike altogether, that Mr. Dombey, while he felt greatly reassured by the change, was quite amazed at it.

After they had left the room together, he thought he heard a soft voice singing; and remembering that Paul had said his sister sung to him, he had the curiosity to open the door and listen, and look after them. She was toiling up the great, wide, vacant staircase, with him in her arms; his head was lying on her shoulder, one of his arms thrown negligently round her neck. So they went, toiling up; she singing all the way, and Paul sometimes crooning out a feeble accompaniment. Mr. Dombey looked after them until they reached the top of the staircase—not without halting to rest by the way—and passed out of his sight; and then he still stood gazing upwards, until the dull rays of the moon, glimmering in a melancholy manner through the dim sky-light, sent him back to his own room.

Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox were convoked in council at dinner next day; and when the cloth was removed, Mr. Dombey opened the proceedings by requiring to be informed, without any gloss or reservation, whether there was anything the matter with Paul, and what Mr. Pilkins said about him.

"For the child is hardly," said Mr. Dombey, "as stout as I could wish."

"With your usual happy discrimination, my dear Paul," returned Mrs. Chick, "you have hit the point at once. Our darling is *not* altogether as stout as we could wish. The fact is, that his mind is too much for him. His soul is a great deal too large for his frame. I am sure the way in which that dear child talks!" said Mrs. Chick, shaking her head, "no one would believe. His expressions, Lucretia, only yesterday, upon the subject of funerals——"

"I am afraid," said Mr. Dombey, interrupting her testily, "that some of those persons up-stairs suggest improper subjects to the child. He was speaking to me last night about his—about his Bones," said Mr. Dombey, laying an irritated stress upon the word. "What on earth has anybody to do with the—with the—bones of my son? He is not a living skeleton, I suppose."

"Very far from it," said Mrs. Chick with unpeppable expression.

"I hope so," returned her brother. "Funerals again! Who talks to the child of funerals? We

are not undertakers, or mutes, or grave-diggers, I believe."

"Very far from it," interposed Mrs. Chick, with the same profound expression as before.

"Then who puts such things into his head?" said Mr. Dombey. "Really I was quite dismayed and shocked last night. Who puts such things into his head, Louisa?"

"My dear Paul," said Mrs. Chick after a moment's silence, "it is of no use inquiring. I do not think, I will tell you candidly, that Wickam is a person of very cheerful spirit, or what one would call a——"

"A daughter of Momus," Miss Tox softly suggested.

"Exactly so," said Mrs. Chick; "but she is exceedingly attentive and useful, and not at all presumptuous; indeed, I never saw a more biddable woman. If the dear child," pursued Mrs. Chick, in the tone of one who was summing up what had been previously quite agreed upon, instead of saying it all for the first time, "is a little weakened by that last attack, and is not in quite such vigorous health as we could wish; and if he has some temporary weakness in his system, and does occasionally seem about to lose, for the moment, the use of his——"

Mrs. Chick was afraid to say limbs, after Mr. Dombey's recent objection to bones, and therefore waited for a suggestion from Miss Tox, who, true to her office, hazarded "members."

"Members!" repeated Mr. Dombey.

"I think the medical gentleman mentioned legs this morning, my dear Louisa; did he not?" said Miss Tox.

"Why, of course he did, my love," retorted Mrs. Chick, mildly reproachful. "How can you ask me? You heard him. I say, if our dear Paul should lose, for the moment, the use of his legs, these are casualties common to many children at his time of life, and not to be prevented by any care or caution. The sooner you understand that, Paul, and admit that, the better."

"Surely you must know, Louisa," observed Mr. Dombey, "that I don't question your natural devotion to, and natural regard for, the future head of my House. Mr. Pilkins saw Paul this morning, I believe?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Yes, he did," returned his sister. "Miss Tox and myself were present. Miss Tox and myself are always present. We make a point of it. Mr. Pilkins has seen him for some days past, and a very clever man I believe him to be. He says it is nothing to speak of; which I can confirm, if that is any consolation; but he recommended,

to-day, sea air. Very wisely, Paul, I feel convinced."

"Sea air," repeated Mr. Dombey, looking at his sister.

"There is nothing to be made uneasy by in that," said Mrs. Chick. "My George and Frederick were both ordered sea air when they were about his age; and I have been ordered it myself a great many times. I quite agree with you, Paul, that perhaps topics may be incautiously mentioned up-stairs before him, which it would be as well for his little mind not to expatiate upon; but I really don't see how that is to be helped in the case of a child of his quickness. If he were a common child, there would be nothing in it. I must say I think, with Miss Tox, that a short absence from this house, the air of Brighton, and the bodily and mental training of so judicious a person as Mrs. Pipchin, for instance—"

"Who is Mrs. Pipchin, Louisa?" asked Mr. Dombey; agast at this familiar introduction of a name he had never heard before.

"Mrs. Pipchin, my dear Paul," returned his sister, "is an elderly lady—Miss Tox knows her whole history—who has for some time devoted all the energies of her mind, with the greatest success, to the study and treatment of infancy, and who has been extremely well connected. Her husband broke his heart in— How did you say her husband broke his heart, my dear? I forget the precise circumstances."

"In pumping water out of the Peruvian Mines," replied Miss Tox.

"Not being a Pumper himself, of course," said Mrs. Chick, glancing at her brother; and it really did seem necessary to offer the explanation, for Miss Tox had spoken of him as if he had died at the handle; "but having invested money in the speculation, which failed. I believe that Mrs. Pipchin's management of children is quite astonishing. I have heard it commended in private circles ever since I was—dear me!—how high?" Mrs. Chick's eye wandered about the bookcase near the bust of Mr. Pitt, which was about ten feet from the ground.

"Perhaps I should say of Mrs. Pipchin, my dear sir," observed Miss Tox with an ingenuous blush, "having been so pointedly referred to, that the encomium which has been passed upon her by your sweet sister is well merited. Many ladies and gentlemen, now grown up to be interesting members of society, have been indebted to her care. The humble individual who addresses you was once under her charge. I believe juvenile nobility itself is no stranger to her establishment."

"Do I understand that this respectable matron keeps an establishment, Miss Tox?" inquired Mr. Dombey condescendingly.

"Why, I really don't know," rejoined that lady, "whether I am justified in calling it so. It is not a Preparatory School by any means. Should I express my meaning," said Miss Tox with peculiar sweetness, "if I designated it an infantine Boarding-House of a very select description?"

"On an exceedingly limited and particular scale," suggested Mrs. Chick, with a glance at her brother.

"Oh! Exclusion itself!" said Miss Tox.

There was something in this. Mrs. Pipchin's husband having broken his heart of the Peruvian mines was good. It had a rich sound. Besides, Mr. Dombey was in a state almost amounting to consternation at the idea of Paul remaining where he was one hour after his removal had been recommended by the medical practitioner. It was a stoppage and delay upon the road the child must traverse, slowly at the best, before the goal was reached. Their recommendation of Mrs. Pipchin had great weight with him; for he knew that they were jealous of any interference with their charge, and he never for a moment took it into account that they might be solicitous to divide a responsibility, of which he had, as shown just now, his own established views. Broke his heart of the Peruvian mines, mused Mr. Dombey. Well, a very respectable way of doing it.

"Supposing we should decide, on to-morrow's inquiries, to send Paul down to Brighton to this lady, who would go with him?" inquired Mr. Dombey after some reflection.

"I don't think you could send the child anywhere at present without Florence, my dear Paul," returned his sister, hesitating. "It's quite an infatuation with him. He's very young, you know, and has his fancies."

Mr. Dombey turned his head away, and going slowly to the bookcase, and unlocking it, brought back a book to read.

"Anybody else, Louisa?" he said, without looking up, and turning over the leaves.

"Wickam, of course. Wickam would be quite sufficient, I should say," returned his sister. "Paul being in such hands as Mrs. Pipchin's, you could hardly send anybody who would be a further check upon her. You would go down yourself once a week at least, of course."

"Of course," said Mr. Dombey, and sat looking at one page for an hour afterwards, without reading one word.

This celebrated Mrs. Pipchin was a marvellous

ill-flavoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and a hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury. Forty years at least had elapsed since the Peruvian mines had been the death of Mr. Pipchin; but his relict still wore black bombazine, of such a lustreless, deep, dead, sombre shade, that gas itself couldn't light her up after dark, and her presence was a quencher to any number of candles. She was generally spoken of as "a great manager" of children; and the secret of her management was, to give them everything that they didn't like, and nothing that they did—which was found to sweeten their dispositions very much. She was such a bitter old lady, that one was tempted to believe there had been some mistake in the application of the Peruvian machinery, and that all her waters of gladness and milk of human kindness had been pumped out dry instead of the mines.

The castle of this ogress and child-queller was in a steep by-street at Brighton; where the soil was more than usually chalky, flinty, and sterile, and the houses were more than usually brittle and thin; where the small front gardens had the unaccountable property of producing nothing but marigolds, whatever was sown in them; and where snails were constantly discovered holding on to the street-doors, and other public places they were not expected to ornament, with the tenacity of cupping-glasses. In the winter-time the air couldn't be got out of the castle, and in the summer-time it couldn't be got in. There was such a continual reverberation of wind in it, that it sounded like a great shell, which the inhabitants were obliged to hold to their ears night and day, whether they liked it or no. It was not, naturally, a fresh-smelling house; and in the window of the front parlour, which was never opened, Mrs. Pipchin kept a collection of plants in pots, which imparted an earthy flavour of their own to the establishment. However choice examples of their kind, too, these plants were of a kind peculiarly adapted to the embowerment of Mrs. Pipchin. There were half-a-dozen specimens of the cactus, writhing round bits of lath, like hairy serpents; another specimen shooting out broad claws, like a green lobster; several creeping vegetables, possessed of sticky and adhesive leaves; and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging to the ceiling, which appeared to have boiled over, and tickling people underneath with its long green ends, reminded them of spiders—in which Mrs. Pipchin's dwelling was uncommonly prolific, though perhaps it

challenged competition still more proudly, in the season, in point of earwigs.

Mrs. Pipchin's scale of charges being high, however, to all who could afford to pay, and Mrs. Pipchin very seldom sweetening the equable acidity of her nature in favour of anybody, she was held to be an old lady of remarkable firmness, who was quite scientific in her knowledge of the childish character. On this reputation, and on the broken heart of Mr. Pipchin, she had contrived, taking one year with another, to eke out a tolerably sufficient living since her husband's demise. Within three days after Mrs. Chick's first allusion to her, this excellent old lady had the satisfaction of anticipating a handsome addition to her current receipts from the pocket of Mr. Dombey; and of receiving Florence and her little brother Paul as inmates of the castle.

Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox, who had brought them down on the previous night (which they all passed at an hotel), had just driven away from the door, on their journey home again; and Mrs. Pipchin, with her back to the fire, stood, reviewing the new-comers, like an old soldier. Mrs. Pipchin's middle-aged niece, her good-natured and devoted slave, but possessing a gaunt and iron-bound aspect, and much afflicted with boils on her nose, was divesting Master Bitherstone of the clean collar he had worn on parade. Miss Pankey, the only other little boarder at present, had that moment been walked off to the castle dungeon (an empty apartment at the back, devoted to correctional purposes), for having sniffed thrice in the presence of visitors.

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Pipchin to Paul, "how do you think you shall like me?"

"I don't think I shall like you at all," replied Paul. "I want to go away. This isn't my house."

"No. It's mine," retorted Mrs. Pipchin.

"It's a very nasty one," said Paul.

"There's a worse place in it than this, though," said Mrs. Pipchin, "where we shut up our bad boys."

"Has *he* ever been in it?" asked Paul: pointing out Master Bitherstone.

Mrs. Pipchin nodded assent; and Paul had enough to do, for the rest of that day, in surveying Master Bitherstone from head to foot, and watching all the workings of his countenance, with the interest attaching to a boy of mysterious and terrible experiences.

At one o'clock there was a dinner, chiefly of the farinaceous and vegetable kind, when Miss Pankey (a mild little blue-eyed morsel of a child,

who was shampooed every morning, and seemed in danger of being rubbed away altogether) was led in from captivity by the ogress herself, and instructed that nobody who sniffed before visitors ever went to Heaven. When this great truth had been thoroughly impressed upon her, she was regaled with rice; and subsequently repeated the form of grace established in the castle, in which there was a special clause, thanking Mrs. Pipchin for a good dinner. Mrs. Pipchin's niece, Berinthia, took cold pork. Mrs. Pipchin, whose constitution required warm nourishment, made a special repast of mutton chops, which were brought in hot and hot, between two plates, and smelt very nice.

As it rained after dinner, and they couldn't go out walking on the beach, and Mrs. Pipchin's constitution required rest after chops, they went away with Berry (otherwise Berinthia) to the dungeon; an empty room looking out upon a chalk wall and a water-butt, and made ghastly by a ragged fire-place without any stove in it. Enlivened by company, however, this was the best place, after all; for Berry played with them there, and seemed to enjoy a game at romps as much as they did; until Mrs. Pipchin, knocking angrily at the wall, like the Cock-Lane ghost revived, they left off, and Berry told them stories in a whisper until twilight.

For tea there was plenty of milk-and-water, and bread-and-butter, with a little black teapot for Mrs. Pipchin and Berry, and buttered toast unlimited for Mrs. Pipchin, which was brought in, hot and hot, like the chops. Though Mrs. Pipchin got very greasy outside over this dish, it didn't seem to lubricate her internally at all; for she was as fierce as ever, and the hard grey eye knew no softening.

After tea, Berry brought out a little workbox, with the Royal Pavilion on the lid, and fell to working busily; while Mrs. Pipchin, having put on her spectacles and opened a great volume bound in green baize, began to read. And whenever Mrs. Pipchin caught herself falling forward into the fire, and woke up, she filleted Master Bitherstone on the nose for nodding too.

At last it was the children's bedtime, and after prayers they went to bed. As little Miss Pankey was afraid of sleeping alone in the dark, Mrs. Pipchin always made a point of driving her up-stairs herself, like a sheep; and it was cheerful to hear Miss Pankey moaning long afterwards, in the least eligible chamber, and Mrs. Pipchin now and then going in to shake her. At about half-past nine o'clock the odour of a warm sweetbread (Mrs. Pipchin's constitution

wouldn't go to sleep without sweetbread) diversified the prevailing fragrance of the house, which Mrs. Wickam said was "a smell of building;" and slumber fell upon the castle shortly after.

The breakfast next morning was like the tea overnight, except that Mrs. Pipchin took her roll instead of toast, and seemed a little more irate when it was over. Master Bitherstone read aloud to the rest a pedigree from Genesis (judiciously selected by Mrs. Pipchin), getting over the names with the ease and clearness of a person tumbling up the treadmill. That done, Miss Pankey was borne away to be shampooed; and Master Bitherstone to have something else done to him with salt water, from which he always returned very blue and dejected. Paul and Florence went out in the meantime on the beach with Wickam—who was constantly in tears—and at about noon Mrs. Pipchin presided over some Early Readings. It being a part of Mrs. Pipchin's system not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster, the moral of these lessons was usually of a violent and stunning character: the hero—a naughty boy—seldom, in the mildest catastrophe, being finished off by anything less than a lion or a bear.

Such was life at Mrs. Pipchin's. On Saturday Mr. Dombey came down; and Florence and Paul would go to his hotel, and have tea. They passed the whole of Sunday with him, and generally rode out before dinner; and on these occasions Mr. Dombey seemed to grow, like Falstaff's assailants, and, instead of being one man in buckram, to become a dozen. Sunday evening was the most melancholy evening in the week; for Mrs. Pipchin always made a point of being particularly cross on Sunday nights. Miss Pankey was generally brought back from an aunt's at Rottingdean in deep distress: and Master Bitherstone, whose relatives were all in India, and who was required to sit, between the services, in an erect position, with his head against the parlour wall, neither moving hand nor foot, suffered so acutely in his young spirits that he once asked Florence on a Sunday night, if she could give him any idea of the way back to Bengal.

But it was generally said that Mrs. Pipchin was a woman of system with children; and no doubt she was. Certainly the wild ones went home tame enough, after sojourning for a few months beneath her hospitable roof. It was generally said, too, that it was highly creditable of Mrs. Pipchin to have devoted herself to this way of life, and to have made such a sacrifice

of her feelings, and such a resolute stand against her troubles, when Mr. Pipchin broke his heart in the Peruvian mines.

At this exemplary old lady Paul would sit staring in his little arm-chair by the fire for any length of time. He never seemed to know what weariness was, when he was looking fixedly at Mrs. Pipchin. He was not fond of her; he was not afraid of her; but, in those old moods of his, she seemed to have a grotesque attraction for him. There he would sit, looking at her, and warming his hands, and looking at her, until he sometimes quite confounded Mrs. Pipchin, ogress as she was. Once she asked him, when they were alone, what he was thinking about.

"You," said Paul, without the least reserve.

"And what are you thinking about me?" asked Mrs. Pipchin.

"I'm thinking how old you must be," said Paul.

"You mustn't say such things as that, young gentleman," returned the dame. "That'll never do."

"Why not?" asked Paul.

"Because it's not polite," said Mrs. Pipchin snappishly.

"Not polite?" said Paul.

"No."

"It's not polite," said Paul innocently, "to eat all the mutton chops and toast, Wickam says."

"Wickam," retorted Mrs. Pipchin, colouring, "is a wicked, impudent, bold-faced hussy."

"What's that?" inquired Paul.

"Never you mind, sir," retorted Mrs. Pipchin.

"Remember the story of the little boy that was gored to death by a mad bull for asking questions."

"If the bull was mad," said Paul, "how did *he* know that the boy had asked questions? Nobody can go and whisper secrets to a mad bull. I don't believe that story."

"You don't believe it, sir?" repeated Mrs. Pipchin, amazed.

"No," said Paul.

"Not if it should happen to have been a tame bull, you little infidel?" said Mrs. Pipchin.

As Paul had not considered the subject in that light, and had founded his conclusions on the alleged lunacy of the bull, he allowed himself to be put down for the present. But he sat turning it over in his mind, with such an obvious intention of fixing Mrs. Pipchin presently, that even that hardy old lady deemed it prudent to retreat until he should have forgotten the subject.

From that time, Mrs. Pipchin appeared to have something of the same odd kind of attraction towards Paul as Paul had towards her. She would make him move his chair to her side of the fire, instead of sitting opposite; and there he would remain in a nook between Mrs. Pipchin and the fender, with all the light of his little face absorbed into the black bombazine drapery, studying every line and wrinkle of her countenance, and peering at the hard grey eye until Mrs. Pipchin was sometimes fain to shut it, on pretence of dozing. Mrs. Pipchin had an old black cat, who generally lay coiled up on the centre foot of the fender, purring egotistically, and winking at the fire until the contracted pupils of his eyes were like two notes of admiration. The good old lady might have been—not to record it disrespectfully—a witch, and Paul and the cat her two familiars, as they all sat by the fire together. It would have been quite in keeping with the appearance of the party if they had all sprung up the chimney in a high wind one night, and never been heard of any more.

This, however, never came to pass. The cat, and Paul, and Mrs. Pipchin were constantly to be found in their usual places after dark; and Paul, eschewing the companionship of Master Bitherstone, went on studying Mrs. Pipchin, and the cat, and the fire, night after night, as if they were a book of necromancy, in three volumes.

Mrs. Wickam put her own construction on Paul's eccentricities; and being confirmed in her low spirits by a perplexed view of chimneys from the room where she was accustomed to sit, and by the noise of the wind, and by the general dullness (gashliness was Mrs. Wickam's strong expression) of her present life, deduced the most dismal reflections from the foregoing premises. It was a part of Mrs. Pipchin's policy to prevent her own "young hussy"—that was Mrs. Pipchin's generic name for female servant—from communicating with Mrs. Wickam: to which end she devoted much of her time to concealing herself behind doors, and springing out on that devoted maiden, whenever she made an approach towards Mrs. Wickam's apartment. But Berry was free to hold what converse she could in that quarter consistently with the discharge of the multifarious duties at which she toiled incessantly from morning to night; and to Berry Mrs. Wickam unburdened her mind.

"What a pretty fellow he is when he's asleep!" said Berry, stopping to look at Paul in bed, one night when she took up Mrs. Wickam's supper.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Wickam. "He need be."

"Why, he's not ugly when he's awake," observed Berry.

"No, ma'am. Oh no! No more was my uncle's Betsey Jane," said Mrs. Wickam.

Berry looked as if she would like to trace the connection of ideas between Paul Dombey and Mrs. Wickam's uncle's Betsey Jane.

"My uncle's wife," Mrs. Wickam went on to say, "died just like his mamma. My uncle's child took on just as Master Paul do. My uncle's child made people's blood run cold sometimes, she did!"

"How?" asked Berry.

"I wouldn't have sat up all night alone with Betsey Jane!" said Mrs. Wickam, "not if you'd have put Wickam into business next morning for himself. I couldn't have done it, Miss Berry."

Miss Berry naturally asked, why not? But Mrs. Wickam, agreeably to the usage of some ladies in her condition, pursued her own branch of the subject without any compunction.

"Betsey Jane," said Mrs. Wickam, "was as sweet a child as I could wish to see. I couldn't wish to see a sweeter. Everything that a child could have in the way of illnesses, Betsey Jane had come through. The cramps was as common to her," said Mrs. Wickam, "as biles is to yourself, Miss Berry." Miss Berry involuntarily wrinkled her nose.

"But Betsey Jane," said Mrs. Wickam, lowering her voice, and looking round the room, and towards Paul in bed, "had been minded, in her cradle, by her departed mother. I couldn't say how, nor I couldn't say when, nor I couldn't say whether the dear child knew it or not, but Betsey Jane had been watched by her mother, Miss Berry! You may say nonsense! I ain't offended, miss. I hope you may be able to think in your own conscience that it *is* nonsense; you'll find your spirits all the better for it in this—you'll excuse my being so free—in this burying-ground of a place; which is wearing of me down. Master Paul's a little restless in his sleep. Pat his back, if you please."

"Of course you think," said Berry, gently doing what she was asked, "that *he* has been nursed by his mother, too?"

"Betsey Jane," returned Mrs. Wickam in her most solemn tones, "was put upon as that child has been put upon, and changed as that child has changed. I have seen her sit, often and often, think, think, thinking, like him. I have seen her look, often and often, old, old, old, like him. I have heard her, many a time, talk just like him. I consider that child and Betsey Jane on the same footing entirely, Miss Berry."

"Is your uncle's child alive?" asked Berry.

"Yes, miss, she is alive," returned Mrs. Wickam with an air of triumph, for it was evident Miss Berry expected the reverse; "and is married to a silver chaser. Oh yes, miss, *SHE* is alive," said Mrs. Wickam, laying strong stress on her nominative case.

It being clear that somebody was dead, Mrs. Pipchin's niece inquired who it was.

"I wouldn't wish to make you uneasy," returned Mrs. Wickam, pursuing her supper. "Don't ask me."

This was the surest way of being asked again. Miss Berry repeated her question, therefore; and, after some resistance and reluctance, Mrs. Wickam laid down her knife, and again glancing round the room and at Paul in bed, replied:

"She took fancies to people; whimsical fancies, some of them; others, affections that one might expect to see—only stronger than common. They all died."

This was so very unexpected and awful to Mrs. Pipchin's niece, that she sat upright on the hard edge of the bedstead, breathing short, and surveying her informant with looks of undisguised alarm.

Mrs. Wickam shook her left forefinger stealthily towards the bed where Florence lay; then turned it upside down, and made several emphatic points at the floor; immediately below which was the parlour in which Mrs. Pipchin habitually consumed the roast.

"Remember my words, Miss Berry," said Mrs. Wickam, "and be thankful that Master Paul is not too fond of you. I am that he's not too fond of me, I assure you; though there isn't much to live for—you'll excuse my being so free—in this gaol of a house!"

Miss Berry's emotion might have led to her patting Paul too hard on the back, or might have produced a cessation of that soothing monotony, but he turned in his bed just now, and presently awaking, sat up in it with his hair hot and wet from the effects of some childish dream, and asked for Florence.

She was out of her own bed at the first sound of his voice; and bending over his pillow immediately, sang him to sleep again. Mrs. Wickam shaking her head, and letting fall several tears, pointed out the little group to Berry, and turned her eyes up to the ceiling.

"Good night, miss!" said Wickam softly, "Good night! Your aunt is an old lady, Miss Berry, and it's what you must have looked for, often."

This consolatory farewell Mrs. Wickam accompanied with a look of heartfelt anguish; and being left alone with the two children again, and

becoming conscious that the wind was blowing mournfully, she indulged in melancholy—that cheapest and most accessible of luxuries—until she was overpowered by slumber.

Although the niece of Mrs. Pipchin did not expect to find that exemplary dragon prostrate on the hearth-rug when she went down-stairs, she was relieved to find her unusually fractious and severe, and with every present appearance of intending to live a long time to be a comfort to all who knew her. Nor had she any symptoms of declining, in the course of the ensuing week, when the constitutional viands still continued to disappear in regular succession, notwithstanding that Paul studied her as attentively as ever, and occupied his usual seat between the black skirts and the fender, with unwavering constancy.

But as Paul himself was no stronger, at the expiration of that time, than he had been on his first arrival, though he looked much healthier in the face, a little carriage was got for him, in which he could lie at his ease, with an alphabet and other elementary works of reference, and be wheeled down to the seaside. Consistent in his odd tastes, the child set aside a ruddy-faced lad who was proposed as the drawer of this carriage, and selected instead his grandfather—a weazen, old, crab-faced man, in a suit of battered oil-skin, who had got tough and stringy from long pickling in salt water, and who smelt like a weedy sea-beech when the tide is out.

With this notable attendant to pull him along, and Florence always walking by his side, and the despondent Wickam bringing up the rear, he went down to the margin of the ocean every day; and there he would sit or lie in his carriage for hours together: never so distressed as by the company of children—Florence alone excepted, always.

“Go away, if you please,” he would say to any child who came to bear him company. “Thank you, but I don’t want you.”

Some small voice, near his ear, would ask him how he was, perhaps.

“I am very well, I thank you,” he would answer. “But you had better go and play, if you please.”

Then he would turn his head, and watch the child away, and say to Florence, “We don’t want any others, do we? Kiss me, Floy.”

He had even a dislike, at such times, to the company of Wickam, and was well pleased when she strolled away, as she generally did, to pick up shells and acquaintances. His favourite spot was quite a lonely one, far away from most loungers; and with Florence sitting by his side

at work, or reading to him, or talking to him, and the wind blowing on his face, and the water coming up among the wheels of his bed, he wanted nothing more.

“Floy,” he said one day, “where’s India, where that boy’s friends live?”

“Oh, it’s a long, long distance off,” said Florence, raising her eyes from her work.

“Weeks off?” asked Paul.

“Yes, dear. Many weeks’ journey, night and day.”

“If you were in India, Floy,” said Paul, after being silent for a minute, “I should—— What is that mamma did? I forget.”

“Loved me?” answered Florence.

“No, no. Don’t I love you now, Floy? What is it?—Died. If you were in India, I should die, Floy.”

She hurriedly put her work aside, and laid her head down on his pillow, caressing him. And so would she, she said, if he were there. He would be better soon.

“Oh! I am a great deal better now!” he answered. “I don’t mean that. I mean that I should die of being so sorry and so lonely, Floy!”

Another time, in the same place, he fell asleep, and slept quietly for a long time. Awaking suddenly, he listened, started up, and sat listening.

Florence asked him what he thought he heard.

“I want to know what it says,” he answered, looking steadily in her face. “The sea, Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?”

She told him that it was only the noise of the rolling waves.

“Yes, yes,” he said. “But I know that they are always saying something. Always the same thing. What place is over there?” He rose up, looking eagerly at the horizon.

She told him that there was another country opposite, but he said he didn’t mean that; he meant farther away—farther away!

Very often afterwards, in the midst of their talk, he would break off, to try to understand what it was that the waves were always saying; and would rise up in his couch to look towards that invisible region far away.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE WOODEN MIDSHIPMAN GETS INTO TROUBLE.

THAT spice of romance and love of the marvellous, of which there was a pretty strong infusion in the nature of young Walter Gay, and

which the guardianship of his uncle, old Solomon Gills, had not very much weakened by the waters of stern practical experience, was the occasion of his attaching an uncommon and delightful interest to the adventure of Florence with Good Mrs. Brown. He pampered and

cherished it in his memory, especially that part of it with which he had been associated, until it became the spoiled child of his fancy, and took its own way, and did what it liked with it.

The recollection of those incidents, and his own share in them, may have been made the



LISTENING TO THE SEA.

more captivating, perhaps, by the weekly dreamings of old Sol and Captain Cuttle on Sundays. Hardly a Sunday passed without mysterious references being made by one or other of those worthy chums to Richard Whittington ; and the latter gentleman had even gone so far as to pur-

chase a ballad of considerable antiquity, that had long fluttered among many others, chiefly expressive of maritime sentiments, on a dead wall in the Commercial Road : which poetical performance set forth the courtship and nuptials of a promising young coal-whipper with a certain

"lovely Peg," the accomplished daughter of the master and part owner of a Newcastle collier. In this stirring legend Captain Cuttle described a profound metaphysical bearing on the case of Walter and Florence; and it excited him so much that on very festive occasions, as birthdays and a few other non-Dominical holidays, he would roar through the whole song in the little back-parlour; making an amazing shake on the word *Pe—e—eg*, with which every verse concluded, in compliment to the heroine of the piece.

But a frank, free-spirited, open-hearted boy is not much given to analysing the nature of his own feelings, however strong their hold upon him: and Walter would have found it difficult to decide this point. He had a great affection for the wharf where he had encountered Florence, and for the streets (albeit not enchanting in themselves) by which they had come home. The shoes that had so often tumbled off by the way, he preserved in his own room; and, sitting in the little back-parlour of an evening, he had drawn a whole gallery of fancy portraits of Good Mrs. Brown. It may be that he became a little smarter in his dress after that memorable occasion; and he certainly liked in his leisure time to walk towards that quarter of the town where Mr. Dombey's house was situated, on the vague chance of passing little Florence in the street. But the sentiment of all this was as 'boyish and innocent as could be.' Florence was very pretty, and it is pleasant to admire a pretty face. Florence was defenceless and weak, and it was a proud thought that he had been able to render her any protection and assistance. Florence was the most grateful little creature in the world, and it was delightful to see her bright gratitude beaming in her face. Florence was neglected and coldly looked upon, and his breast was full of youthful interest for the slighted child in her dull, stately home.

Thus it came about that perhaps some half-a-dozen times in the course of the year Walter pulled off his hat to Florence in the street, and Florence would stop to shake hands. Mrs. Wickam (who, with a characteristic alteration of his name, invariably spoke of him as "Young Graves") was so well used to this, knowing the story of their acquaintance, that she took no heed of it at all. Miss Nipper, on the other hand, rather looked out for these occasions: her sensitive young heart being secretly propitiated by Walter's good looks, and inclining to the belief that its sentiments were responded to.

In this way, Walter, so far from forgetting or losing sight of his acquaintance with Florence,

only remembered it better and better. As to its adventurous beginning, and all those little circumstances which gave it a distinctive character and relish, he took them into account, more as a pleasant story very agreeable to his imagination, and not to be dismissed from it, than as a part of any matter of fact with which *he* was concerned. They set off Florence very much, to his fancy; but not himself. Sometimes he thought (and then he walked very fast), what a grand thing it would have been for him to have been going to sea on the day after that first meeting, and to have gone, and to have done wonders there, and to have stopped away a long time, and to have come back an admiral of all the colours of the dolphin, or at least a post-captain with epaulets of insupportable brightness, and have married Florence (then a beautiful young woman) in spite of Mr. Dombey's teeth, cravat, and watch-chain, and borne her away to the blue shores of somewhere or other triumphantly. But these flights of fancy seldom burnished the brass-plate of Dombey and Son's offices into a tablet of golden hope, or shed a brilliant lustre on their dirty sky-lights; and when the captain and Uncle Sol talked about Richard Whittington and masters' daughters, Walter felt that he understood his true position at Dombey and Son's much better than they did.

So it was that he went on doing what he had to do from day to day, in a cheerful, pains-taking, merry spirit; and saw through the sanguine complexion of Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle; and yet entertained a thousand indistinct and visionary fancies of his own, to which theirs were work-a-day probabilities. Such was his condition at the Pipchin period, when he looked a little older than of yore, but not much; and was the same light-footed, light-hearted, light-headed lad as when he charged into the parlour at the head of Uncle Sol and the imaginary boarders, and lighted him to bring up *the madeira*.

"Uncle Sol," said Walter, "I don't think you're well. You haven't eaten any breakfast. I shall bring a doctor to you, if you go on like this."

"He can't give me what I want, my boy," said Uncle Sol. "At least, he is in good practice if he can—and then he wouldn't."

"What is it, uncle? Customers?"

"Ay," returned Solomon with a sigh. "Customers would do."

"Confound it, uncle!" said Walter, putting down his breakfast-cup with a clatter, and striking his hand on the table; "when I see

the people going up and down the street in shoals all day, and passing and repassing the shop every minute by scores, I feel half tempted to rush out, collar somebody, bring him in, and *make* him buy fifty pounds' worth of instruments for ready money. What are you looking in at the door for?" continued Walter, apostrophizing an old gentleman with a powdered head (inaudibly to him, of course), who was staring at a ship's telescope with all his might and main. "*That's* no use. I could do that. Come in and buy it!"

The old gentleman, however, having satiated his curiosity, walked calmly away.

"There he goes!" said Walter. "That's the way with 'em all. But, uncle—I say, Uncle Sol"—for the old man was meditating, and had not responded to his first appeal—"don't be cast down. Don't be out of spirits, uncle. When orders *do* come, they'll come in such a crowd, you won't be able to execute 'em."

"I shall be past executing 'em, whenever they come, my boy," returned Solomon Gills. "They'll never come to this shop again till I am out of it."

"I say, uncle! You mustn't really, you know!" urged Walter. "Don't!"

Old Sol endeavoured to assume a cheery look, and smiled across the little table at him as pleasantly as he could.

"There's nothing more than usual the matter; is there, uncle?" said Walter, leaning his elbows on the tea-tray, and bending over, to speak the more confidentially and kindly. "Be open with me, uncle, if there is, and tell me all about it."

"No, no, no," returned old Sol. "More than usual? No, no. What should there be the matter more than usual?"

Walter answered with an incredulous shake of his head. "That's what I want to know," he said, "and you ask *me*! I'll tell you what, uncle, when I see you like this, I am quite sorry that I live with you."

Old Sol opened his eyes involuntarily.

"Yes. Though nobody ever was happier than I am, and always have been, with you, I am quite sorry that I live with you, when I see you with anything on your mind."

"I am a little dull at such times, I know," observed Solomon, meekly rubbing his hands.

"What I mean, Uncle Sol," pursued Walter, bending over a little more to pat him on the shoulder, "is, that then I feel you ought to have, sitting here and pouring out the tea, instead of me, a nice little dumping of a wife, you know—a comfortable, capital, cosy old lady, who was just a match for you, and knew how to manage

you, and keep you in good heart. Here am I, as loving a nephew as ever was (I am sure I ought, to be!), but I am only a nephew, and I can't be such a companion to you when you are low and out of sorts as she would have made herself years ago, though I'm sure I'd give any money if I could cheer you up. And so I say, when I see you with anything on your mind, that I feel quite sorry you haven't got somebody better about you than a blundering young rough-and-tough boy like me, who has got the will to console you, uncle, but hasn't got the way—hasn't got the way," repeated Walter, reaching over further yet, to shake his uncle by the hand.

"Wally, my dear boy," said Solomon, "if the cosy little old lady had taken her place in this parlour five-and-forty years ago, I never could have been fonder of her than I am of you."

"I know that, Uncle Sol," returned Walter. "Lord bless you, I know that. But you wouldn't have had the whole weight of any uncomfortable secrets if she had been with you, because she would have known how to relieve you of 'em, and I don't."

"Yes, yes, you do," returned the instrument-maker.

"Well, then, what's the matter, Uncle Sol?" said Walter coaxingly. "Come! What's the matter?"

Solomon Gills persisted that there was nothing the matter; and maintained it so resolutely, that his nephew had no resource but to make a very indifferent imitation of believing him.

"All I can say is, Uncle Sol, that if there is——"

"But there isn't," said Solomon.

"Very well," said Walter. "Then I've no more to say; and that's lucky, for my time's up for going to business. I shall look in by-and-by, when I'm out, to see how you get on, uncle. And mind, uncle! I'll never believe you again, and never tell you anything more about Mr. Carker the junior, if I find out that you have been deceiving me!"

Solomon Gills laughingly defied him to find out anything of the kind; and Walter, revolving in his thoughts all sorts of impracticable ways of making fortunes and placing the Wooden Midshipman in a position of independence, betook himself to the offices of Dombey and Son with a heavier countenance than he usually carried there.

There lived in those days round the corner—in Bishopsgate Street Without—one Brogley, sworn broker and appraiser, who kept a shop where every description of second-hand furniture was exhibited in the most uncomfortable aspect,

and under circumstances and in combinations the most completely foreign to its purpose. Dozens of chairs hooked on to washing-stands, which with difficulty poised themselves on the shoulders of sideboards, which, in their turn stood upon the wrong side of dining-tables, gymnastic with their legs upward on the tops of other dining-tables, were among its most reasonable arrangements. A banquet array of dish-covers, wine-glasses, and decanters was generally to be seen spread forth upon the bosom of a four-post bedstead, for the entertainment of such genial company as half-a-dozen pokers and a hall lamp. A set of window curtains, with no windows belonging to them, would be seen gracefully draping a barricade of chests of drawers, loaded with little jars from chemists' shops; while a homeless hearth-rug, severed from its natural companion the fireside, braved the shrewd east wind in its adversity, and trembled in melancholy accord with the shrill complainings of a cabinet piano, wasting away, a string a day, and faintly resounding to the noises of the street in its jangling and distracted brain. Of motionless clocks that never stirred a finger, and seemed as incapable of being successfully wound up as the pecuniary affairs of their former owners, there was always great choice in Mr. Brogley's shop; and various looking-glasses, accidentally placed at compound interest of reflection and refraction, presented to the eye an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin.

Mr. Brogley himself was a moist-eyed, pink-complexioned, crisp-haired man, of a bulky figure and an easy temper—for that class of Caius Marius, who sits upon the ruins of other people's Carthages, can keep up his spirits well enough. He had looked in at Solomon's shop sometimes, to ask a question about articles in Solomon's way of business; and Walter knew him sufficiently to give him good day when they met in the street; but, as that was the extent of the broker's acquaintance with Solomon Gills also, Walter was not a little surprised when he came back in the course of the forenoon, agreeably to his promise, to find Mr. Brogley sitting in the back-parlour with his hands in his pockets, and his hat hanging up behind the door.

"Well, Uncle Sol!" said Walter. The old man was sitting ruefully on the opposite side of the table, with his spectacles over his eyes, for a wonder, instead of on his forehead. "How are you now?"

Solomon shook his head, and waved one hand towards the broker, as introducing him.

"Is there anything the matter?" asked Walter, with a catching in his breath.

"No, no. There's nothing the matter," said Mr. Brogley. "Don't let it put you out of the way."

Walter looked from the broker to his uncle in mute amazement.

"The fact is," said Mr. Brogley, "there is a little payment on a bond debt—three hundred and seventy odd, over-due: and I'm in possession."

"In possession!" cried Walter, looking round at the shop.

"Ah!" said Mr. Brogley in confidential assent, and nodding his head as if he would urge the advisability of their all being comfortable together. "It's an execution. That's what it is. Don't let it put you out of the way. I come myself because of keeping it quiet and sociable. You know me. It's quite private."

"Uncle Sol!" faltered Walter.

"Wally, my boy," returned his uncle, "it's the first time. Such a calamity never happened to me before. I'm an old man to begin." Pushing up his spectacles again (for they were useless any longer to conceal his emotion), he covered his face with his hand, and sobbed aloud, and his tears fell down upon his coffee-coloured waistcoat.

"Uncle Sol! Pray! On, don't!" exclaimed Walter, who really felt a thrill of terror in seeing the old man weep. "For God's sake, don't do that. Mr. Brogley, what shall I do?"

"I should recommend you looking up a friend or so," said Mr. Brogley, "and talking it over."

"To be sure!" cried Walter, catching at anything. "Certainly! Thankee. Captain Cuttle's the man, uncle. Wait till I run to Captain Cuttle. Keep your eye upon my uncle, will you, Mr. Brogley, and make him as comfortable as you can while I am gone? Don't despair, Uncle Sol. Try and keep a good heart there's a dear fellow!"

Saying this with great fervour, and disregarding the old man's broken remonstrances, Walter dashed out of the shop again as hard as he could go; and, having hurried round to the office to excuse himself on the plea of his uncle's sudden illness, set off, full speed, for Captain Cuttle's residence.

Everything seemed altered as he ran along the streets. There was the usual entanglement and noise of carts, drays, omnibuses, waggons, and foot-passengers, but the misfortune that had fallen on the Wooden Midshipman made it strange and new. Houses and shops were different from what they used to be, and bore Mr. Brogley's warrant on their fronts in large characters. The broker seemed to have got hold

of the very churches; for their spires rose into the sky with an unwonted air. Even the sky itself was changed, and had an execution in it plainly.

Captain Cuttle lived on the brink of a little canal near the India Docks, where there was a swivel bridge, which opened now and then to let some wandering monster of a ship come roaming up the street like a stranded leviathan. The gradual change from land to water, on the approach to Captain Cuttle's lodgings, was curious. It began with the erection of flagstuffs, as appurtenances to public-houses; then came slop-sellers' shops, with Guernsey shirts, sou'-wester hats, and canvas pantaloons, at once the tightest and the loosest of their order, hanging up outside. These were succeeded by anchor and chain-cable forges; where sledge-hammers were dinging upon iron all day long. Then came rows of houses, with little vane-surmounted masts uprearing themselves from among the scarlet beans. Then, ditches. Then, pollard willows. Then, more ditches. Then, unaccountable patches of dirty water, hardly to be descried for the ships that covered them. Then, the air was perfumed with chips; and all other trades were swallowed up in mast, oaf, and block making, and boat building. Then, the ground grew marshy and unsettled. Then, there was nothing to be smelt but rum and sugar. Then, Captain Cuttle's lodgings—at once a first floor and a top story, in Brig Place—were close before you.

The captain was one of those timber-looking men, suits of oak as well as hearts, whom it is almost impossible for the liveliest imagination to separate from any part of their dress, however insignificant. Accordingly, when Walter knocked at the door, and the captain instantly poked his head out of one of his little front windows, and hailed him, with the hard glazed hat already on it, and the shirt collar like a sail, and the wide suit of blue all standing as usual, Walter was as fully persuaded that he was always in that state as if the captain had been a bird, and those had been his feathers.

"Wal'r, my lad!" said Captain Cuttle. "Stand by, and knock again. Hard! 'It's washing day.'"

Walter, in his impatience, gave a prodigious thump with the knocker.

"Hard it is!" said Captain Cuttle, and immediately drew in his head as if he expected a squall.

Nor was he mistaken; for a widow lady, with her sleeves rolled up to her shoulders, and her arms frothy with soap-suds and smoking with hot

water, replied to the summons with startling rapidity. Before she looked at Walter she looked at the knocker, and then, measuring him with her eyes from head to foot, said she wondered he had left any of it.

"Captain Cuttle's at home, I know," said Walter, with a conciliatory smile.

"Is he?" replied the widow lady. "In-deed!"

"He has just been speaking to me," said Walter in breathless explanation.

"Has he?" replied the widow lady. "Then p'rhaps you'll give him Mrs. MacStinger's respects, and say that the next time he lowers himself and his lodgings by talking out of winder, she'll thank him to come down and open the door too." Mrs. MacStinger spoke loud, and listened for any observations that might be offered from the first floor.

"I'll mention it," said Walter, "if you'll have the goodness to let me in, ma'am."

For he was repelled by a wooden fortification extending across the doorway, and put there to prevent the little MacStingers, in their moments of recreation, from tumbling down the steps.

"A boy that can knock my door down," said Mrs. MacStinger contemptuously, "can get over that, I should hope!" But Walter, taking this as a permission to enter, and getting over it, Mrs. MacStinger immediately demanded whether an Englishwoman's house was her castle or not; and whether she was to be broke, in upon by "raff." On these subjects her thirst for information was still very importunate, when Walter, having made his way up the little staircase through an artificial fog occasioned by the washing, which covered the banisters with a clammy perspiration, entered Captain Cuttle's room, and found that gentleman in ambush behind the door.

"Never owed her a penny, Wal'r," said Captain Cuttle in a low voice, and with visible marks of trepidation on his countenance. "Done her a world of good turns, and the children too. Vixen at times, though. Whew!"

"I should go away, Captain Cuttle," said Walter.

"Dursn't do it, Wal'r," returned the captain. "She'd find me out, wherever I went. Sit down. How's Gills?"

The captain was dining (in his hat) off cold loin of mutton, porter, and some smoking hot potatoes, which he had cooked himself, and took out of a little saucepan before the fire as he wanted them. He unscrewed his hook at dinner-time, and screwed a knife into its wooden socket instead, with which he had already begun to peel one of these potatoes for Walter. His rooms

were very small, and strongly impregnated with tobacco smoke, but snug enough: everything being stowed away as if there were an earthquake regularly every half-hour.

"How's Gills?" inquired the captain.

Walter, who had by this time recovered his breath, and lost his spirits—or such temporary spirits as his rapid journey had given him—looked at his questioner for a moment, said, "Oh, Captain Cuttle!" and burst into tears.

No words can describe the captain's consternation at this sight. Mrs. MacStinger faded into nothing before it. He dropped the potato and the fork—and would have dropped the knife too if he could—and sat gazing at the boy, as if he expected to hear next moment that a gulf had opened in the City, which had swallowed up his old friend, coffee-coloured suit, buttons, chronometer, spectacles, and all.

But when Walter told him what was really the matter, Captain Cuttle, after a moment's reflection, started up into full activity. He emptied out of a little tin canister, on the top shelf of the cupboard, his whole stock of ready money (amounting to thirteen pounds and half-a-crown), which he transferred to one of the pockets of his square blue coat: further enriched that repository with the contents of his plate chest, consisting of two withered atomies of tea-spoons and an obsolete pair of knock-kneed sugar-tongs; pulled up his immense double-cased silver watch from the depths in which it reposed, to assure himself that that valuable was sound and whole; re-attached the hook to his right wrist; and seizing the stick covered over with knobs, bade Walter come along.

Remembering, however, in the midst of his virtuous excitement, that Mrs. MacStinger might be lying in wait below, Captain Cuttle hesitated at last, not without glancing at the window, as if he had some thought of escaping by that unusual means of egress, rather than encounter his terrible enemy. He decided, however, in favour of stratagem.

"Wal'r," said the captain with a timid wink, "go afore, my lad. Sing out, 'Good-bye; Captain Cuttle,' when you're in the passage, and shut the door. Then wait at the corner of the street till you see me."

These directions were not issued without a previous knowledge of the enemy's tactics, for when Walter got down-stairs, Mrs. MacStinger glided out of the little back-kitchen like an avenging spirit. But not gliding out upon the captain, as she had expected, she merely made a further allusion to the knocker, and glided in again.

Some five minutes elapsed before Captain Cuttle could summon courage to attempt his escape; for Walter waited so long at the street corner, looking back at the house, before there were any symptoms of the hard glazed hat. At length the captain burst out of the door with the suddenness of an explosion, and coming towards him at a great pace, and never once looking over his shoulder, pretended, as soon as they were well out of the street, to whistle a tune.

"Uncle much hove down, Wal'r?" inquired the captain as they were walking along.

"I am afraid so. If you had seen him this morning, you would never have forgotten it."

"Walk fast, Wal'r, my lad," returned the captain, mending his pace; "and walk the same all the days of your life. Overhaul the catechism for that advice, and keep it!"

The captain was too busy with his own thoughts of Solomon Gills, mingled, perhaps, with some reflections on his late escape from Mrs. MacStinger, to offer any further quotations on the way for Walter's moral improvement. They interchanged no other word until they arrived at old Sol's door, where the unfortunate Wooden Midshipman, with his instrument at his eye, seemed to be surveying the whole horizon in search of some friend to help him out of his difficulty.

"Gills!" said the captain, hurrying into the back-parlour, and taking him by the hand quite tenderly. "Lay your head well to the wind, and we'll fight through it. All you've got to do," said the captain, with the solemnity of a man who was delivering himself of one of the most precious practical tenets ever discovered by human wisdom, "is to lay your head well to the wind, and we'll fight through it!"

Old Sol returned the pressure of his hand, and thanked him.

Captain Cuttle then, with a gravity suitable to the nature of the occasion, put down upon the table the two tea-spoons and the sugar-tongs, the silver watch, and the ready money; and asked Mr. Brogley, the broker, what the damage was.

"Come! What do you make of it?" said Captain Cuttle.

"Why, Lord help you!" returned the broker; "you don't suppose that property's of any use, do you?"

"Why not?" inquired the captain.

"Why? The amount's three hundred and seventy odd," replied the broker.

"Never mind," returned the captain, though he was evidently dismayed by the figures: "all's fish that comes to your net, I suppose?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Brogley. "But sprats an't whales, you know."

The philosophy of this observation seemed to strike the captain. He ruminated for a minute; eyeing the broker, meanwhile, as a deep genius; and then called the instrument-maker aside.

"Gills," said Captain Cuttle, "what's the bearings of this business? Who's the creditor?"

"Hush!" returned the old man. "Come away. Don't speak before Wally. It's a matter of security for Wally's father—an old bond. I've paid a good deal of it, Ned, but the times are so bad with me that I can't do more just now. I've foreseen it, but I couldn't help it. Not a word before Wally, for all the world."

"You have got *some* money, haven't you?" whispered the captain.

"Yes, yes—oh yes—I've got some," returned old Sol, first putting his hands into his empty pockets, and then squeezing his Welsh wig between them, as if he thought he might wring some gold out of it; "but I—the little I have got isn't convertible, Ned; it can't be got at. I have been trying to do something with it for Wally, and I'm, old-fashioned, and behind the time. It's here and there, and—and, in short, it's as good as nowhere," said the old man, looking in bewilderment about him.

He had so much the air of a half-witted person who had been hiding his money in a variety of places, and had forgotten where, that the captain followed his eyes, not without a faint hope that he might remember some few hundred pounds concealed up the chimney, or down in the cellar. But Solomon Gills knew better than that.

"I'm behind the time altogether, my dear Ned," said Sol in resigned despair, "a long way. It's no use my lagging on so far behind it. The stock had better be sold—it's worth more than this debt—and I had better go and die somewhere on the balance. I haven't any energy left. I don't understand things. This had better be the end of it. Let 'em sell the stock and take *him* down," said the old man, pointing feebly to the Wooden Midshipman, "and let us both be broken up together."

"And what d'ye mean to do with Wal'r?" said the captain. "There, there! Sit ye down, Gills, sit ye down, and let me think o' this. If I warn't a man on a small annuity, that was large enough till to-day, I hadn't need to think of it. But you lay your head well to the wind," said the captain, again administering that unanswerable piece of consolation, "and you're all right!"

Old Sol thanked him from his heart, and went

and laid it against the back-parlour fire-place instead.

Captain Cuttle walked up and down the shop for some time, cogitating profoundly, and bringing his bushy black eyebrows to bear so heavily on his nose, like clouds, settling on a mountain, that Walter was afraid to offer any interruption to the current of his reflections. Mr. Brogley, who was averse to being any constraint upon the party, and who had an ingenious cast of mind, went, softly whistling, among the stock; rattling weather-glasses, shaking compasses as if they were physic, catching up keys with loadstones, looking through telescopes, endeavouring to make himself acquainted with the use of the globes, setting parallel rulers astride on his nose, and amusing himself with other philosophical transactions.

"Wal'r!" said the captain at last. "I've got it."

"Have you, Captain Cuttle?" cried Walter with great animation.

"Come this way, my lad," said the captain. "The stock's one security. I'm another. Your governor's the man to advance the money."

"Mr. Dombey?" faltered Walter.

The captain nodded gravely. "Look at him," he said. "Look at Gills. If they was to sell off these things now, he'd die of it. You know he would. We mustn't leave a stone unturned—and there's a stone for you."

"A stone!—Mr. Dombey!" faltered Walter.

"You run round to the office, first of all, and see if he's there," said Captain Cuttle, clapping him on the back. "Quick!"

Walter felt he must not dispute the command—a glance at his uncle would have determined him if he had felt otherwise—and disappeared to execute it. He soon returned, out of breath, to say that Mr. Dombey was not there. It was Saturday, and he had gone to Brighton.

"I tell you what, Wal'r!" said the captain, who seemed to have prepared himself for this contingency in his absence. "We'll go to Brighton. I'll back you, my boy. I'll back you, Wal'r. We'll go to Brighton by the afternoon's coach."

If the application must be made to Mr. Dombey at all, which was awful to think of, Walter felt that he would rather prefer it alone and unassisted than backed by the personal influence of Captain Cuttle, to which he hardly thought Mr. Dombey would attach much weight. But as the captain appeared to be of quite another opinion, and was bent upon it, and as his friendship was too zealous and serious to be trifled with by one so much younger than himself, he

forbore to hint the least objection. Cuttle, therefore, taking a hurried leave of Solomon Gills, and returning the ready money, the teaspoons, the sugar-tongs, and the silver watch to his pocket—with a view, as Walter thought with horror, to making a gorgeous impression on Mr. Dombey—bore him off to the coach-office without a minute's delay, and repeatedly assured him, on the road, that he would stick by him to the last.

CHAPTER X.

CONTAINING THE SEQUEL OF THE MIDSHIPMAN'S DISASTER.

MAJOR BAGSTOCK, after long and frequent observation of Paul, across Princess's Place, through his double-barrelled opera-glass; and after receiving many minute reports, daily, weekly, and monthly, on that subject from the native, who kept himself in constant communication with Miss Tox's maid for that purpose: came to the conclusion that Dombey, sir, was a man to be known, and that J. B. was the boy to make his acquaintance.

Miss Tox, however, maintaining her reserved behaviour, and frigidly declining to understand the major whenever he called (which he often did) on any little fishing excursion connected with this project, the major, in spite of his constitutional toughness and slyness, was fain to leave the accomplishment of his desire in some measure to chance, "which," as he was used to observe with chuckles at his club, "has been fifty to one in favour of Joey B., sir, ever since his elder brother died of Yellow Jack in the West Indies."

It was some time coming to his aid in the present instance, but it befriended him at last. When the dark servant, with full particulars, reported Miss Tox absent on Brighton service, the major was suddenly touched with affectionate reminiscences of his friend Bill Bitherstone of Bengal, who had written to ask him, if he ever went that way, to bestow a call upon his only son. But when the same dark servant reported Paul at Mrs. Pipchin's, and the major, referring to the letter favoured by Master Bitherstone on his arrival in England—to which he had never had the least idea of paying any attention—saw the opening that presented itself, he was made so ravid by the gout, with which he happened to be then laid up, that he threw a footstool at the dark servant in return for his intelligence, and

swore he would be the death of the rascal before he had done with him: which the dark servant was more than half disposed to believe.

At length the major, being released from his fit, went one Saturday growling down to Brighton, with the native behind him: apostrophizing Miss Tox all the way, and gloating over the prospect of carrying by storm the distinguished friend to whom she attached so much mystery, and for whom she had deserted him.

"Would you, ma'am, would you?" said the major, straining with vindictiveness, and swelling every already swollen vein in his head. "Would you give Joey B. the go-by, ma'am? Not yet, ma'am, not yet! Damme, not yet, sir. Joe is awake, ma'am. Bagstock is alive, sir. J. B. knows a move or two, ma'am. Josh has his weather-eye open, sir. You'll find him tough, ma'am. Tough, sir, tough is Joseph. Tough and de-vil-ish sly!"

And very tough indeed Master Bitherstone found him, when he took that young gentleman out for a walk. But the major, with his complexion like a Stilton cheese, and his eyes like a prawn's, went roving about, perfectly indifferent to Master Bitherstone's amusement, and dragging Master Bitherstone along, while he looked about him high and low for Mr. Dombey and his children.

In good time the major, previously instructed by Mrs. Pipchin, spied out Paul and Florence, and bore down upon them; there being a stately gentleman (Mr. Dombey, doubtless) in their company. Charging with Master Bitherstone into the very heart of the little squadron, it fell out, of course, that Master Bitherstone spoke to his fellow-sufferers. Upon that the major stopped to notice and admire them; remembered with amazement that he had seen and spoken to them at his friend Miss Tox's in Princess's Place; opined that Paul was a devilish fine fellow, and his own little friend; inquired if he remembered Joey B. the major; and finally, with a sudden recollection of the conventionalities of life, turned and apologised to Mr. Dombey.

"But my little friend here, sir, said the major, "makes a boy of me again. An old soldier, sir—Major Bagstock, at your service—is not ashamed to confess it." Here the major lifted his hat. "Damme, sir," cried the major with sudden warmth, "I envy you." Then he recollected himself, and added, "Excuse my freedom."

Mr. Dombey begged he wouldn't mention it.

"An old campaigner, sir," said the major, "a smoke-dried, sunburnt, used-up, invalided old

dog of a major, sir, was not afraid of being condemned for his whim by a man like Mr. Dombey. I believe the honour of addressing Mr. Dombey, I believe?"

"I am the present unworthy representative of that name, major," returned Mr. Dombey.

"By G——, sir," said the major, "it's a great name. It's a name, sir," said the major firmly, as if he defied Mr. Dombey to contradict him, and would feel it his painful duty to bully him if he did, "that is known and honoured in the British possessions abroad. It is a name, sir, that a man is proud to recognise. There is nothing adulatory in Joseph Bagstock, sir. His Royal Highness the Duke of York observed, on more than one occasion, 'There is no adulation in Joey. He is a plain old soldier, is Joe. He is tough to a fault, is Joseph:' but it's a great name, sir. By the Lord, it's a great name!" said the major solemnly.

"You are good enough to rate it higher than it deserves, perhaps, major," returned Mr. Dombey.

"No, sir," said the major. "My little friend here, sir, will certify for Joseph Bagstock that he is a thorough-going, downright, plain-spoken old Trump, sir, and nothing more. That boy, sir," said the major in a lower tone, "will live in history. That boy, sir, is not a common production. Take care of him, Mr. Dombey."

Mr. Dombey seemed to intimate that he would endeavour to do so.

"Here is a boy here, sir," pursued the major confidentially, and giving him a thrust with his cane. "Son of Bitherstone of Bengal. Bill Bitherstone, formerly of Ours. That boy's father and myself, sir, were sworn friends. Wherever you went, sir, you heard of nothing but Bill Bitherstone and Joe Bagstock. Am I blind to that boy's defects? By no means. He's a fool, sir."

Mr. Dombey glanced at the libelled Master Bitherstone, of whom he knew at least as much as the major did, and said, in quite a complacent manner, "Really?"

"That is what he is, sir," said the major. "He's a fool. Joe Bagstock never minces matters. The son of my old friend Bill Bitherstone of Bengal is a born fool, sir." Here the major laughed till he was almost black. "My little-friend is destined for a public school, I presume, Mr. Dombey?" said the major when he had recovered.

"I am not quite decided," returned Mr. Dombey. "I think not. He is delicate."

"If he's delicate, sir," said the major, "you are right. None but the tough fellows could

live through it, sir, at Sandhurst. We put each other to the torture there, sir. We roasted the new fellows at a slow fire, and hung 'em out of a three pair of stairs window, with their heads downwards. Joseph Bagstock, sir, was held out of the window by the heels of his boots for thirteen minutes by the college clock."

The major might have appealed to his countenance in corroboration of this story. It certainly looked as if he had hung out a little too long.

"But it made us what we were, sir," said the major, settling his shirt-frill. "We were iron, sir, and it forged us. Are you remaining here, Mr. Dombey?"

"I generally come down once a week, major," returned that gentleman. "I stay at the Bedford."

"I shall have the honour of calling at the Bedford, sir, if you'll permit me," said the major. "Joey B., sir, is not in general a calling name, but Mr. Dombey's is not a common name. I am much indebted to my little friend, sir, for the honour of this introduction."

Mr. Dombey made a very gracious reply; and Major Bagstock, having patted Paul on the head, and said of Florence that her eyes would play the devil with the youngsters before long—"and the oldesters too, sir, if you come to that," added the major, chuckling very much—stirred up Master Bitherstone with his walking-stick, and departed with that young gentleman at a kind of half-trot; rolling his head and coughing with great dignity, as he staggered away with his legs very wide asunder.

In fulfilment of his promise, the major afterwards called on Mr. Dombey; and Mr. Dombey, having referred to the Army List, afterwards called on the major. Then the major called at Mr. Dombey's house in town; and came down again, in the same coach as Mr. Dombey. In short, Mr. Dombey and the major got on uncommonly well together, and uncommonly fast; and Mr. Dombey observed of the major, to his sister, that besides being quite a military man, he was really something more, as he had a very admirable idea of the importance of things unconnected with his own profession.

At length Mr. Dombey, bringing down Miss Tox and Mrs. Chick to see the children, and finding the major again at Brighton, invited him to dinner at the Bedford, and complimented Miss Tox highly, beforehand, on her neighbour and acquaintance. Notwithstanding the palpitation of the heart which these allusions occasioned her, they were anything but disagreeable to Miss Tox, as they enabled her to be extremely

interesting, and to manifest an occasional incoherence and distraction which she was not at all unwilling to display. The major gave her abundant opportunities of exhibiting this emotion: being profuse in his complaints, at dinner, of her desertion of him and Princess's Place: and, as he appeared to derive great enjoyment from making them, they all got on very well.

None the worse on account of the major taking charge of the whole conversation, and showing as great an appetite in that respect as in regard of the various dainties on the table, among which he may be almost said to have wallowed: greatly to the aggravation of his inflammatory tendencies. Mr. Dombey's habitual silence and reserve yielding readily to this usurpation, the major felt that he was coming out and shining: and, in the flow of spirits thus engendered, rang such an infinite number of new changes on his own name that he quite astonished himself. In a word, they were all very well pleased. The major was considered to possess an inexhaustible fund of conversation; and when he took a late farewell, after a long rubber, Mr. Dombey again complimented the blushing Miss Tox on her neighbour and acquaintance.

But all the way home to his own hotel, the major incessantly said to himself, and of himself, "Sly, sir—sly, sir—de-vil-ish sly!" And, when he got there, sat down in a chair, and fell into a silent fit of laughter, with which he was sometimes seized, and which was always particularly awful. It held him so long on this occasion that the dark servant, who stood watching him at a distance, but dared not for his life approach, twice or thrice gave him over for lost. His whole form, but especially his face and head, dilated beyond all former experience; and presented to the dark man's view nothing but a heaving mass of indigo. At length he burst into a violent paroxysm of coughing, and, when that was a little better, burst into such ejaculations as the following:

"Would you, ma'am, would you? Mrs. Dombey, eh, ma'am? I think not, ma'am. Not while Joe B. can put a spoke in your wheel, ma'am. J. B.'s even with you now, ma'am. He isn't altogether bowled out yet, sir, isn't Bagstock. She's deep, sir, deep, but Josh is deeper. Wide awake is old Joe—broad awake, and staring, sir!" There was no doubt of this last assertion being true, and to a very fearful extent; as it continued to be during the greater part of that night, which the major chiefly passed in similar exclamations, diversified with fits of

coughing and choking that startled the whole house.

It was on the day after this occasion (being Sunday) when, as Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Chick, and Miss Tox were sitting at breakfast, still eulogising the major, Florence came running in: her face suffused with a bright colour, and her eyes sparkling joyfully: and cried,

"Papa! Papa! Here's Walter! and he won't come in."

"Who?" cried Mr. Dombey. "What does she mean? What is this?"

"Walter, papa," said Florence timidly; sensible of having approached the presence with too much familiarity. "Who found me when I was lost."

"Does she mean young Gay, Louisa?" inquired Mr. Dombey, knitting his brows. "Really, this child's manners have become very boisterous. She cannot mean young Gay, I think. See what it is, will you?"

Mrs. Chick hurried into the passage, and returned with the information that it was young Gay, accompanied by a very strange-looking person; and that young Gay said he would not take the liberty of coming in, hearing Mr. Dombey was at breakfast, but would wait until Mr. Dombey should signify that he might approach.

"Tell the boy to come in now," said Mr. Dombey. "Now, Gay, what is the matter? Who sent you down here? Was there nobody else to come?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," returned Walter. "I have not been sent. I have been so bold as to come on my own account, which I hope you'll pardon when I mention the cause."

But Mr. Dombey, without attending to what he said, was looking impatiently on either side of him (as if he were a pillar in his way), at some object behind.

"What's that?" said Mr. Dombey. "Who is that? I think you have made some mistake in the door, sir."

"Oh, I'm very sorry to intrude with any one, sir," cried Walter hastily: "but this is—this is Captain Cuttle, sir."

"Wal'r, my lad," observed the captain in a deep voice: "stand by!"

At the same time the captain, coming a little further in, brought out his wide suit of blue, his conspicuous shirt collar, and his knobby nose in full relief, and stood bowing to Mr. Dombey, and waving his hook politely to the ladies, with the hard glazed hat in his one hand, and a red equator round his head which it had newly imprinted there.

Mr. Dombey regarded this phenomenon with amazement and indignation, and seemed by his looks to appeal to Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox against it. Little Paul, who had come in after Florence, backed towards Miss Tox as the captain waved his hook, and stood on the defensive.

"Now; Gay," said Mr. Dombey, "what have you got to say to me?"

Again the captain observed, as a general opening of the conversation that could not fail to propitiate all parties, "Wal'r, stand by!"

"I am afraid, sir," began Walter, trembling, and looking down at the ground, "that I take a very great liberty in coming—indeed, I am sure I do. I should hardly have had the courage to ask to see you, sir, even after coming down, I am afraid, if I had not overtaken Miss Dombey. And—"

"Well?" said Mr. Dombey, following his eyes as he glanced at the attentive Florence, and frowning unconsciously as she encouraged him with a smile. "Go on, if you please."

"Ay, ay," observed the captain, considering it incumbent on him, as a point of good breeding, to support Mr. Dombey. "Well said! Go on, Wal'r."

Captain Cuttle ought to have been withered by the look which Mr. Dombey bestowed upon him in acknowledgment of his patronage. But, quite innocent of this, he closed one eye in reply, and gave Mr. Dombey to understand, by certain significant motions of his hook, that Walter was a little bashful at first, and might be expected to come out shortly.

"It is entirely a private and personal matter that has brought me here, sir," continued Walter, faltering, "and Captain Cuttle—"

"Here!" interposed the captain, as an assurance that he was at hand, and might be relied upon.

"—Who is a very old friend of my poor uncle's, and a most excellent man, sir," pursued Walter, raising his eyes with a look of entreaty in the captain's behalf, "was so good as to offer to come with me, which I could hardly refuse."

"No, no, no," observed the captain complacently. "Of course not. No call for refusing. Go on, Wal'r."

"And therefore, sir," said Walter, venturing to meet Mr. Dombey's eye, and proceeding with better courage in the very desperation of the case, now that there was no avoiding it, "therefore I have come with him, sir, to say that my poor old uncle is in very great affliction and distress. That through the gradual loss of his business, and not being able to make a payment,

the apprehension of which has weighed very heavily upon his mind, months and months, as indeed I know, sir, he has an execution in his house, and is in danger of losing all he has, and breaking his heart. And that if you would, in your kindness, and in your old knowledge of him as a respectable man, do anything to help him out of his difficulty, sir, we never could thank you enough for it."

Walter's eyes filled with tears as he spoke; and so did those of Florence. Her father saw them glistening, though he appeared to look at Walter only.

"It is a very large sum, sir," said Walter. "More than three hundred pounds. My uncle is quite beaten down by his misfortune, it lies so heavy on him; and is quite unable to do anything for his own relief. He doesn't even know yet that I have come to speak to you. You would wish me to say, sir," added Walter after a moment's hesitation, "exactly what it is I want. I really don't know, sir. There is my uncle's stock, on which I believe I may say, confidently, there are no other demands, and there is Captain Cuttle, who would wish to be security too. I—I hardly like to mention," said Walter, "such earnings as mine; but if you would allow them—accumulate—payment—advance—uncle—frugal, honourable old man." Walter trailed off through these broken sentences into silence; and stood, with downcast head, before his employer.

Considering this a favourable moment for the display of the valuables, Captain Cuttle advanced to the table; and clearing a space among the breakfast-cups at Mr. Dombey's elbow, produced the silver watch, the ready money, the tea-spoons, and the sugar-tongs; and piling them up into a heap that they might look as precious as possible, delivered himself of these words:

"Half a loaf's better than no bread, and the same remark holds good with crumbs. There's a few. Annuity of one hundred pounds primum also ready to be made over. If there is a man chock-full of science in the world, it's old Sol Gills. If there is a lad of promise—one flowing," added the captain, in one of his happy quotations, "with milk and honey—it's his nevy!"

The captain then withdrew to his former place, where he stood arranging his scattered locks with the air of a man who had given the finishing touch to a difficult performance.

When Walter ceased to speak, Mr. Dombey's eyes were attracted to little Paul, who, seeing his sister hanging down her head and silently

weeping in her commiseration for the distress she had heard described, went over to her, and tried to comfort her: looking at Walter and his father, as he did so, with a very expressive face. After the momentary distraction of Captain

Cuttle's address, which he regarded with lofty indifference, Mr. Dombey again turned his eyes upon his son, and sat steadily regarding the child, for some moments, in silence.

"What was this debt contracted for?"



"AND, WHEN HE GOT THERE, SAT DOWN IN A CHAIR, AND FELL INTO A SILENT FIT OF LAUGHTER, WITH WHICH HE WAS SOMETIMES SEIZED, AND WHICH WAS ALWAYS PARTICULARLY AWFUL."

asked Mr. Dombey at length. "Who is the creditor?"

"He don't know," replied the captain, putting his hand on Walter's shoulder. "I do. It came of helping a man that's dead now, and that's cost my friend Gills many a hundred

pound already. More particulars in private, if agreeable."

"People who have enough to do to hold their own way," said Mr. Dombey, unobservant of the captain's mysterious signs behind Walter, and still looking at his son, "had better be con-

tent with their own obligations and difficulties, and not increase them by engaging for other men. It is an act of dishonesty, and presumption too," said Mr. Dombey sternly; "great presumption; for the wealthy could do no more. Paul, come here!"

The child obeyed: and Mr. Dombey took him on his knee.

"If you had money now——" said Mr. Dombey. "Look at me!"

Paul, whose eyes had wandered to his sister, and to Walter, looked his father in the face.

"If you had money now," said Mr. Dombey, "as much money as young Gay has talked about; what would you do?"

"Give it to his old uncle," returned Paul.

"Lend it to his old uncle, eh?" retorted Mr. Dombey. "Well! When you are old enough, you know, you will share my money, and we shall use it together."

"Dombey and Son," interrupted Paul, who had been tutored early in the phrase.

"Dombey and Son," repeated his father. "Would you like to begin to be Dombey and Son now, and lend this money to young Gay's uncle?"

"Oh! if you please, papa!" said Paul; "and so would Florence."

"Girls," said Mr. Dombey, "have nothing to do with Dombey and Son. Would *you* like it?"

"Yes, papa, yes!"

"Then you shall do it," returned his father. "And you see, Paul," he added, dropping his voice, "how powerful money is, and how anxious people are to get it. Young Gay comes all this way to beg for money, and you, who are so grand and great, having got it, are going to let him have it as a great favour and obligation."

Paul turned up the old face for a moment, in which there was a sharp understanding of the reference conveyed in these words; but it was a young and childish face immediately afterwards, when he slipped down from his father's knee, and ran to tell Florence not to cry any more, for he was going to let young Gay have the money.

Mr. Dombey then turned to a side-table, and wrote a note and sealed it. During the interval Paul and Florence whispered to Walter, and Captain Cuttle beamed on the three, with such aspiring and ineffably presumptuous thoughts as Mr. Dombey never could have believed in. The note being finished, Mr. Dombey turned round to his former place, and held it out to Walter.

"Give that," he said, "the first thing to-morrow morning, to Mr. Carker. He will immediately take care that one of my people releases your uncle from his present position, by paying the amount at issue; and that such arrangements are made for its repayment as may be consistent with your uncle's circumstances. You will consider that this is done for you by Master Paul."

Walter, in the emotion of holding in his hand the means of releasing his good uncle from his trouble, would have endeavoured to express something of his gratitude and joy. But Mr. Dombey stopped him short.

"You will consider that it is done," he repeated, "by Master Paul. I have explained that to him, and he understands it. I wish no more to be said."

As he motioned towards the door, Walter could only bow his head and retire. Miss Tox, seeing that the captain appeared about to do the same, interposed.

"My dear sir," she said, addressing Mr. Dombey, at whose munificence both she and Mrs. Chick were shedding tears copiously, "I think you have overlooked something. Pardon me, Mr. Dombey, I think, in the nobility of your character, and its exalted scope, you have omitted a matter of detail."

"Indeed, Miss Tox!" said Mr. Dombey.

"The gentleman with the——Instrument," pursued Miss Tox, glancing at Captain Cuttle, "has left upon the table at your elbow——"

"Good Heaven!" said Mr. Dombey, sweeping the captain's property from him, as if it were so much crumb indeed. "Take these things away. I am obliged to you, Miss Tox; it is like your usual discretion. Have the goodness to take these things away, sir!"

Captain Cuttle felt he had no alternative but to comply. But he was so much struck by the magnanimity of Mr. Dombey, in refusing treasures lying heaped up to his hand, that when he had deposited the tea-spoons and sugar-tongs in one pocket, and the ready money in another, and had lowered the great watch down slowly into its proper vault, he could not refrain from seizing that gentleman's right hand in his own solitary left, and while he held it open with his powerful fingers, bringing the hook down upon its palm in a transport of admiration. At this touch of warm feeling and cold iron, Mr. Dombey shivered all over.

Captain Cuttle then kissed his hook to the ladies several times, with great elegance and gallantry; and, having taken a particular leave of Paul and Florence, accompanied Walter out

of the room. Florence was running after them, in the earnestness of her heart, to send some message to old Sol, when Mr. Dombey called her back, and bade her stay where she was.

"Will you *never* be a Dombey, my dear child?" said Mrs. Chick with pathetic reproachfulness.

"Dear aunt," said Florence, "don't be angry with me. I am so thankful to papa."

She would have run and thrown her arms about his neck if she had dared; but, as she did not dare, she glanced with thankful eyes towards him as he sat musing; sometimes bestowing an uneasy glance on her, but, for the most part, watching Paul, who walked about the room with the new-blown dignity of having let young Gay have the money.

And young Gay—Walter—what of him?

He was overjoyed to purge the old man's hearth from bailiffs and brokers, and to hurry back to his uncle with the good tidings. He was overjoyed to have it all arranged and settled next day before noon; and to sit down at evening in the little back-parlour with old Sol and Captain Cuttle; and to see the instrument-maker already reviving, and hopeful for the future, and feeling that the Wooden Midshipman was his own again. But, without the least impeachment of his gratitude to Mr. Dombey, it must be confessed that Walter was humbled and cast down. It is when our budding hopes are nipped beyond recovery by some rough wind that we are the most disposed to picture to ourselves what flowers they might have borne, if they had flourished; and now, when Walter felt himself cut off from that great Dombey height, by the depth of a new and terrible tumble, and felt that all his old wild fancies had been scattered to the winds in the fall, he began to suspect that they might have led him on to harmless visions of aspiring to Florence in the remote distance of time.

The captain viewed the subject in quite a different light. He appeared to entertain a belief that the interview at which he had assisted was so very satisfactory and encouraging as to be only a step or two removed from a regular betrothal of Florence to Walter; and that the late transaction had immensely forwarded, if not thoroughly established, the Whittingtonian hopes. Stimulated by this conviction, and by the improvement in the spirits of his old friend, and by his own consequent gaiety, he even attempted, in favouring them with the ballad of "Lovely Peg" for the third time in one evening, to make an extemporaneous substitution of the name of "Florence;" but finding this difficult, on ac-

count of the word Peg invariably rhyming to leg (in which personal beauty the original was described as having excelled all competitors), he hit upon the happy thought of changing it to Fle—c—eg; which he accordingly did, with an archness almost supernatural, and a voice quite vociferous, notwithstanding that the time was close at hand when he must seek the abode of the dreadful ?'s. MacStinger.

HAPTER XI.

PAUL'S INTRODUCTION TO A NEW SCENE.

MRS. PIPCHIN'S constitution was made of such hard metal, in spite of its liability to the fleshly weaknesses of standing in need of repose after chops, and of requiring to be coaxed to sleep by the soporific agency of sweetbreads, that it utterly set at nought the predictions of Mrs. Wickam, and showed no symptoms of decline. Yet, as Paul's rapt interest in the old lady continued unabated, Mrs. Wickam would not budge an inch from the position she had taken up. Fortifying and entrenching herself on the strong ground of her uncle's Betsey Jane, she advised Miss Berry, as a friend, to prepare herself for the worst; and forewarned her that her aunt might, at any time, be expected to go off suddenly, like a powder-mill.

Poor Berry took it all in good part, and drugged and slaved away as usual; perfectly convinced that Mrs. Pipchin was one of the most meritorious persons in the world, and making every day innumerable sacrifices of herself upon the altar of that noble old woman. But all these immolations of Berry were somehow carried to the credit of Mrs. Pipchin by Mrs. Pipchin's friends and admirers; and were made to harmonise with, and carry out, that melancholy fact of the deceased Mr. Pipchin having broken his heart in the Peruvian mines.

For example, there was an honest grocer and general dealer in the retail line of business, between whom and Mrs. Pipchin there was a small memorandum book, with a greasy red cover, perpetually in question, and concerning which divers secret councils and conferences were continually being held between the parties to the register, on the mat in the passage, and with closed doors in the parlour. Nor were there wanting dark hints from Master Bitherstone (whose temper had been made revengeful by

the solar heats of India acting on his blood), of balances unsettled, and of a failure, on one occasion within his memory, in the supply of moist sugar at tea-time. This grocer being a bachelor, and not a man who looked upon the surface for beauty, had once made honourable offers for the hand of Berry, which Mrs. Pipchin had, with contumely and scorn, rejected. Everybody said how laudable this was in Mrs. Pipchin, relict of a man who had died of the Peruvian mines; and what a staunch, high, independent spirit the old lady had. But nobody said anything about poor Berry, who cried for six weeks (being soundly rated by her good aunt all the time), and lapsed into a state of hopeless spinsterhood.

"Berry's very fond of you, ain't she?" Paul once asked, Mrs. Pipchin when they were sitting by the fire with the cat.

"Yes," said Mrs. Pipchin.

"Why?" asked Paul.

"Why!" returned the disconcerted old lady.

"How can you ask such things, sir? Why are you fond of your sister Florence?"

"Because she's very good," said Paul.

"There's nobody like Florence."

"Well!" retorted Mrs. Pipchin, shortly, "and there's nobody like me, I suppose."

"Ain't there, really though?" asked Paul, leaning forward in his chair, and looking at her very hard.

"No," said the old lady.

"I am glad of that," observed Paul, rubbing his hands thoughtfully. "That's a very good thing."

Mrs. Pipchin didn't dare to ask him why, lest she should receive some perfectly annihilating answer. But, as a compensation to her wounded feelings, she harassed Master Bitherstone to that extent, until bedtime, that he began that very night to make arrangements for an overland return to India, by secreting from his supper a quarter of a round of bread and a fragment of moist Dutch cheese, as the beginning of a stock of provision to support him on the voyage.

Mrs. Pipchin had kept watch and ward over little Paul and his sister for nearly twelve months. They had been, home twice, but only for a few days; and had been constant in their weekly visits to Mr. Dombey at the hotel. By little and little Paul had grown stronger, and had become able to dispense with his carriage; though he still looked thin and delicate; and still remained the same old, quiet, dreamy child that he had been when first consigned to Mrs. Pipchin's care. One Saturday afternoon, at dusk, great consternation was occasioned in the castle by the unlooked-for announcement of Mr. Dombey as a

visitor to Mrs. Pipchin. The population of the parlour was immediately swept up-stairs as on the wings of a whirlwind, and after much slamming of bedroom doors, and trampling overhead, and some knocking about of Master Bitherstone by Mrs. Pipchin, as a relief to the perturbation of her spirits, the black bombazine garments of the worthy old lady darkened the audience-chamber where Mr. Dombey was contemplating the vacant arm-chair of his son and heir.

"Mrs. Pipchin," said Mr. Dombey, "how do you do?"

"Thank you, sir," said Mrs. Pipchin, "I am pretty well, considering."

Mrs. Pipchin always used that form of words. It meant considering her virtues, sacrifices, and so forth.

"I can't expect, sir, to be very well," said Mrs. Pipchin, taking a chair, and fetching her breath; "but such health as I have I am grateful for."

Mr. Dombey inclined his head with the satisfied air of a patron, who felt that this was the sort of thing for which he paid so much a quarter. After a moment's silence he went on to say:

"Mrs. Pipchin, I have taken the liberty of calling, to consult you in reference to my son. I have had it in my mind to do so for some time past; but have deferred it from time to time, in order that his health might be thoroughly re-established. You have no misgivings on that subject, Mrs. Pipchin?"

"Brighton has proved very beneficial, sir," returned Mrs. Pipchin. "Very beneficial indeed."

"I purpose," said Mr. Dombey, "his remaining at Brighton."

Mrs. Pipchin rubbed her hands, and bent her grey eyes on the fire.

"But," pursued Mr. Dombey, stretching out his forefinger, "but possibly that he should now make a change, and lead a different kind of life here. In short, Mrs. Pipchin, that is the object of my visit. My son is getting on, Mrs. Pipchin. Really he is getting on."

There was something melancholy in the triumphant air with which Mr. Dombey said this. It showed how long Paul's childish life had been to him, and how his hopes were set upon a later stage of his existence. Pity may appear a strange word to connect with any one so haughty and so cold, and yet he seemed a worthy subject for it at that moment.

"Six years old!" said Mr. Dombey, settling his neckcloth—perhaps to hide an irrepressible smile that rather seemed to strike upon the sur-

face of his face and glance away, as finding no resting-place, than to play there for an instant. "Dear me, six will be changed to sixteen before we have time to look about us."

"Ten years," croaked the unsympathetic Pipchin, with a frosty glistening of her hard grey eye, and a dreary shaking of her bent head, "is a long time."

"It depends on circumstances," returned Mr. Dombey; "at all events, Mrs. Pipchin, my son is six years old, and there is no doubt, I fear, that in his studies he is behind many children of his age—or his youth," said Mr. Dombey, quickly answering what he mistrusted was a shrewd twinkle of the frosty eye, "his youth is a more appropriate expression. Now, Mrs. Pipchin, instead of being behind his peers, my son ought to be before them; far before them. There is an eminence ready for him to mount upon. There is nothing of chance or doubt in the course before my son. His way in life was clear and prepared, and marked out, before he existed. The education of such a young gentleman must not be delayed. It must not be left imperfect. It must be very steadily and seriously undertaken, Mrs. Pipchin."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Pipchin, "I can say nothing to the contrary."

"I was quite sure, Mrs. Pipchin," returned Mr. Dombey approvingly, "that a person of your good sense could not, and would not."

"There is a great deal of nonsense—and worse—talked about young people not being pressed too hard at first, and being tempted on, and all the rest of it, sir," said Mrs. Pipchin, impatiently rubbing her hooked nose. "It never was thought of in my time, and it has no business to be thought of now. My opinion is, 'keep 'em at it.'"

"My good madam," returned Mr. Dombey, "you have not acquired your reputation undeservedly; and I beg you to believe, Mrs. Pipchin, that I am more than satisfied with your excellent system of management, and shall have the greatest pleasure in commending it whenever my poor commendation"—Mr. Dombey's loftiness, when he affected to disparage his own importance, passed all bounds—"can be of any service. I have been thinking of Doctor Blimber's, Mrs. Pipchin."

"My neighbour, sir?" said Mrs. Pipchin. "I believe the Doctor's is an excellent establishment. I've heard that it's very strictly conducted, and that there's nothing but learning going on from morning to night."

"And it's very expensive," added Mr. Dombey.

"And it's very expensive, sir," returned Mrs. Pipchin, catching at the fact, as if, in omitting that, she had omitted one of its leading merits.

"I have had some communication with the Doctor, Mrs. Pipchin," said Mr. Dombey, hitching his chair anxiously a little nearer to the fire, "and he does not consider Paul at all too young for his purpose. He mentioned several instances of boys in Greek at about the same age. If I have any little uneasiness in my own mind, Mrs. Pipchin, on the subject of this change, it is not on that head. My son, not having known a mother, has gradually concentrated much—too much—of his childish affection on his sister. Whether their separation—" Mr. Dombey said no more, but sat silent.

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Mrs. Pipchin, shaking out her black bombazine skirts, and plucking up all the ogress within her. "If she don't like it, Mr. Dombey, she must be taught to lump it." The good lady apologised immediately afterwards for using so common a figure of speech, but said (and truly) that that was the way *she* reasoned with 'em.

Mr. Dombey waited until Mrs. Pipchin had done bridling and shaking her head, and frowning down a legion of Bitherstones and Pankeys; and then said quietly, but correctively, "He, my good madam, he."

Mrs. Pipchin's system would have applied very much the same mode of cure to any uneasiness on the part of Paul too, but, as the hard grey eye was sharp enough to see that the recipe, however Mr. Dombey might admit its efficacy in the case of the daughter, was not a sovereign remedy for the son, she argued the point; and contended that change, and new society, and the different form of life he would lead at Doctor Blimber's, and the studies he would have to master, would very soon prove sufficient alienations. As this chimed in with Mr. Dombey's own hope and belief, it gave that gentleman a still higher opinion of Mrs. Pipchin's understanding; and as Mrs. Pipchin, at the same time, bewailed the loss of her dear little friend (which was not an overwhelming shock to her, as she had long expected it, and had not looked, in the beginning, for his remaining with her longer than three months), he formed an equally good opinion of Mrs. Pipchin's disinterestedness. It was plain that he had given the subject anxious consideration, for he had formed a plan, which he announced to the ogress, of sending Paul to the Doctor's as a weekly boarder for the first half-year, during which time Florence would remain at the castle,

that she might receive her brother there on Saturdays. This would wean him by degrees, Mr. Dombey said: probably with a recollection of his not having been weaned by degrees on a former occasion.

Mr. Dombey finished the interview by expressing his hope that Mrs. Pipchin would still remain in office as general superintendent and overseer of his son, pending his studies at Brighton; and having kissed Paul, and shaken hands with Florence, and beheld Master Bitherstone in his collar of state, and made Miss Pankey cry by patting her on the head (in which region she was uncommonly tender, on account of a habit Mrs. Pipchin had of sounding it with her knuckles, like a cask), he withdrew to his hotel and dinner: resolved that Paul, now that he was getting so old and well, should begin a vigorous course of education forthwith, to qualify him for the position in which he was to shine; and that Doctor Blimber should take him in hand immediately.

Whenever a young gentleman was taken in hand by Doctor Blimber, he might consider himself sure of a pretty tight squeeze. The Doctor only undertook the charge of ten young gentlemen, but he had, always ready, a supply of learning for a hundred, on the lowest estimate; and it was at once the business and delight of his life to gorge the unhappy ten with it.

In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hothouse, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones, too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other.

This was all very pleasant and ingenious, but the system of forcing was attended with its usual disadvantages. There was not the right taste about the premature productions, and they didn't keep well. Moreover, one young gentleman, with a swollen nose and an excessively large head (the oldest of the ten, who had "gone through" everything), suddenly left off blowing one day, and remained in the establishment a mere stalk. And people did say that the

Doctor had rather overdone it with young Toots, and that when he began to have whiskers he left off having brains.

There young Toots was, at any rate; possessed of the gruffest of voices and the shrillest of minds; sticking ornamental pins into his shirt, and keeping a ring in his waistcoat pocket to put on his little finger by stealth, when the pupils went out walking; constantly falling in love by sight with nursery-maids, who had no idea of his existence; and looking at the gas-lighted world over the little iron bars in the left-hand corner window of the front three pairs of stairs, after bedtime, like a greatly overgrown cherub who had sat up aloft much too long.

The Doctor was a portly gentleman in a suit of black, with strings at his knees, and stockings below them. He had a bald head, highly polished; a deep voice; and a chin so very double, that it was a wonder how he ever managed to shave into the creases. He had likewise a pair of little eyes that were always half shut up, and a mouth that was always half expanded into a grin, as if he had, that moment, posed a boy, and were waiting to convict him from his own lips. Inasmuch, that when the Doctor put his right hand into the breast of his coat, and with his other hand behind him, and a scarcely perceptible wag of his head, made the commonest observation to a nervous stranger, it was like a sentiment from the Sphinx, and settled his business.

The Doctor's was a mighty fine house, fronting the sea. Not a joyful style of house within, but quite the contrary. Sad-coloured curtains, whose proportions were spare and lean, hid themselves despondently behind the windows. The tables and chairs were put away in rows, like figures in a sum; fires were so rarely lighted in the rooms of ceremony, that they felt like wells, and a visitor represented the bucket; the dining-room seemed the last place in the world where any eating or drinking was likely to occur; there was no sound through all the house but the ticking of a great clock in the hall, which made itself audible in the very garrets; and sometimes a dull crying of young gentlemen at their lessons, like the murmurings of an assemblage of melancholy pigeons.

Miss Blimber, too, although a slim and graceful maid, did no soft violence to the gravity of the house. There was no light nonsense about Miss Blimber. She kept her hair short and crisp, and wore spectacles. She was dry and sandy with working in the graves of deceased languages. None of your live languages for Miss Blimber. They must be dead—stone dead

—and then Miss Blimber dug them up like a Ghoul.

Mrs. Blimber, her mamma, was not learned herself, but she pretended to be, and that did quite as well. She said, at evening parties, that if she could have known Cicero, she thought she could have died contented. It was the steady joy of her life to see the Doctor's young gentlemen go out walking, unlike all other young gentlemen, in the largest possible shirt collars and the stiffest possible cravats. It was so classical, she said.

As to Mr. Feeder, B.A., Doctor Blimber's assistant, he was a kind of human barrel-organ, with a little list of tunes at which he was continually working, over and over again, without any variation. He might have been fitted up with a change of barrels, perhaps, in early life, if his destiny had been favourable; but it had not been; and he had only one, with which, in a monotonous round, it was his occupation to bewilder the young ideas of Doctor Blimber's young gentlemen. The young gentlemen were prematurely full of carking anxieties. They knew no rest from the pursuit of stony-hearted verbs, savage noun-substantives, inflexible syntactic passages, and ghosts of exercises that appeared to them in their dreams. Under the forcing system, a young gentleman usually took leave of his spirits in three weeks. He had all the cares of the world on his head in three months. He conceived bitter sentiments against his parents or guardians in four; he was an old misanthrope in five; envied Curtius that blessed refuge in the earth in six; and at the end of the first twelvemonth had arrived at the conclusion, from which he never afterwards departed, that all the fancies of the poets, and lessons of the sages, were a mere collection of words and grammar, and had no other meaning in the world.

But he went on, blow, blow, blowing, in the Doctor's hothouse, all the time; and the Doctor's glory and reputation were great when he took his wintry growth home to his relations and friends.

Upon the Doctor's door-steps, one day, Paul stood with a fluttering heart, and with his small right hand in his father's. His other hand was locked in that of Florence. How tight the tiny pressure of that one; and how loose and cold the other!

Mrs. Pipchin hovered behind the victim, with her sable plumage and her hooked beak, like a bird of ill omen. She was out of breath—for Mr. Dombey, full of great thoughts, had walked fast—and she croaked hoarsely as she waited for the opening of the door.

"Now, Paul," said Mr. Dombey exultingly, "this is the way indeed to be Dombey and Son, and have money. You are almost a man already."

"Almost," returned the child.

Even his childish agitation could not master the sly and quaint, yet touching look, with which he accompanied the reply.

It brought a vague expression of dissatisfaction into Mr. Dombey's face; but, the door being opened, it was quickly gone.

"Doctor Blimber is at home, I believe?" said Mr. Dombey.

The man said yes; and, as they passed in, looked at Paul as if he were a little mouse, and the house were a trap. He was a weak-eyed young man, with the first faint streaks of early dawn of a grin on his countenance. It was more imbecility; but Mrs. Pipchin took it into her head that it was impudence, and made a snap at him directly.

"How dare you laugh behind the gentleman's back?" said Mrs. Pipchin. "And what do you take me for?"

"I ain't a laughing at nobody, and I'm sure I don't take you for nothing, ma'am," returned the young man in consternation.

"A pack of idle dogs!" said Mrs. Pipchin, "only fit to be turnspits. Go and tell your master that Mr. Dombey's here, or it'll be worse for you!"

The weak-eyed young man went, very meekly, to discharge himself of this commission; and soon came back to invite them to the Doctor's study.

"You're laughing again, sir," said Mrs. Pipchin, when it came to her turn, bringing up the rear, to pass him in the hall.

"I *ain't*," returned the young man, grievously oppressed. "I never see such a thing as this!"

"What is the matter, Mrs. Pipchin?" said Mr. Dombey, looking round. "Softly! Pray!"

Mrs. Pipchin, in her deference, merely muttered at the young man as she passed on, and said, "Oh! he was a precious fellow"—leaving the young man, who was all meekness and incapacity, affected even to tears by the incident. But Mrs. Pipchin had a way of falling foul of all meek people; and her friends said, who could wonder at it, after the Peruvian mines?

The Doctor was sitting in his portentous study, with a globe at each knee, books all round him, Homer over the door, and Minerva on the mantel-shelf. "And how do you, sir?" he said to Mr. Dombey, "and how is my little friend?" Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him

up, and to go on saying, "How, is, my, lit, tle, friend? How, is, my, lit, tle, friend?" over and over and over again.

The little friend being something too small to be seen at all from where the Doctor sat, over the books on his table, the Doctor made several futile attempts to get a view of him round the legs; which Mr. Dombey perceiving, relieved the Doctor from his embarrassment by taking Paul up in his arms, and sitting him on another little table, over against the Doctor, in the middle of the room.

"Ha!" said the Doctor, leaning back in his chair, with his hand in his breast. "Now I see my little friend. How do you do, my little friend?"

The clock in the hall wouldn't subscribe to this alteration in the form of words, but continued to repeat "How, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?"

"Very well, I thank you, sir," returned Paul, answering the clock quite as much as the Doctor.

"Ha!" said Doctor Blimber. "Shall we make a man of him?"

"Do you hear, Paul?" added Mr. Dombey; Paul being silent.

"Shall we make a man of him?" repeated the Doctor.

"I had rather be a child," replied Paul.

"Indeed!" said the Doctor. "Why?"

The child sat on the table looking at him, with a curious expression of suppressed emotion in his face, and beating one hand proudly on his knee, as if he had the rising tears beneath it, and crushed them. But his other hand strayed a little way the while, a little farther—farther from him yet—until it lighted on the neck of Florence. "This is why," it seemed to say, and then the steady look was broken up and gone; and the working lip was loosened; and the tears came streaming forth.

"Mrs. Pipchin," said his father in a querulous manner, "I am really very sorry to see this."

"Come away from him, do, Miss Dombey," quoth the matron.

"Never mind," said the Doctor, blandly nodding his head to keep Mrs. Pipchin back. "Never mind; we shall substitute new cares and new impressions, Mr. Dombey, very shortly. You would still wish my little friend to acquire——"

"Everything, if you please, Doctor," returned Mr. Dombey firmly.

"Yes," said the Doctor, who, with his half-shut eyes and his usual smile, seemed to survey Paul with the sort of interest that might attach

to some choice little animal he was going to stuff. "Yes, exactly. Ha! We shall impart a great variety of information to our little friend, and bring him quickly forward, I dare say. I dare say. Quite a virgin soil. I believe you said, Mr. Dombey?"

"Except some ordinary preparation at home, and from this lady," replied Mr. Dombey, introducing Mrs. Pipchin, who instantly communicated a rigidity to her whole muscular system, and snorted defiance beforehand, in case the Doctor should disparage her; "except so far, Paul has, as yet, applied himself to no studies at all."

Doctor Blimber inclined his head, in gentle tolerance of such insignificant poaching as Mrs. Pipchin's, and said he was glad to hear it. It was much more satisfactory, he observed, rubbing his hands, to begin at the foundation. And again he leered at Paul, as if he would have liked to tackle him with the Greek alphabet on the spot.

"That circumstance, indeed, Doctor Blimber," pursued Mr. Dombey, glancing at his little son, "and the interview I have already had the pleasure of holding with you, render any further explanation, and consequently, any further intrusion on your valuable time, so unnecessary, that——"

"Now, Miss Dombey," said the acid Pipchin.

"Permit me," said the Doctor, "one moment. Allow me to present Mrs. Blimber and my daughter, who will be associated with the domestic life of our young Pilgrim to Parnassus. Mrs. Blimber,"—for the lady, who had perhaps been in waiting, opportunely entered, followed by her daughter, that fair sexton in spectacles,—"Mr. Dombey. My daughter Cornelia, Mr. Dombey. Mr. Dombey, my love," pursued the Doctor, turning to his wife, "is so confiding as to—— Do you see our little friend?"

Mrs. Blimber, in an excess of politeness, of which Mr. Dombey was the object, apparently did not, for she was backing against the little friend, and very much endangering his position on the table. But, on this hint, she turned to admire his classical and intellectual lineaments, and turning again to Mr. Dombey, said, with a sigh, that she envied his dear son.

"Like a bee, sir," said Mrs. Blimber, with uplifted eyes, "about to plunge into a garden of the choicest flowers, and sip the sweets for the first time. Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Terence, Plautus, Cicero. What a world of honey have we here! It may appear remarkable, Mr. Dombey, in one who is a wife—the wife of such a husband——"

"Hush, hush," said Doctor Blimber. "Fie for shame!"

"Mr. Dombey will forgive the partiality of a wife," said Mrs. Blimber with an engaging smile.

Mr. Dombey answered "Not at all:" applying those words, it is to be presumed, to the partiality, and not to the forgiveness.

"—And it may seem remarkable in one who is a mother also——" resumed Mrs. Blimber.

"And such a mother," observed Mr. Dombey, bowing with some confused idea of being complimentary to Cornelia.

"But really," pursued Mrs. Blimber, "I think if I could have known Cicero, and been his friend, and talked with him in his retirement at Tusculum (beau-ti-ful Tusculum!), I could have died contented."

A learned enthusiasm is so very contagious, that Mr. Dombey half believed this was exactly his case; and even Mrs. Pipchin, who was not, as we have seen, of an accommodating disposition generally, gave utterance to a little sound between a groan and a sigh, as if she would have said that nobody but Cicero could have proved a lasting consolation under that failure of the Peruvian mines, but that he indeed would have been a very Davy-lamp of refuge.

Cornelia looked at Mr. Dombey through her spectacles, as if she would have liked to crack a few quotations with him from the authority in question. But this design, if she entertained it, was frustrated by a knock at the room-door.

"Who is that?" said the Doctor. "Oh! Come in, Toots; come in. Mr. Dombey, sir." Toots bowed. "Quite a coincidence!" said Doctor Blimber. "Here we have the beginning and the end. Alpha and Omega. Our head boy, Mr. Dombey."

The Doctor might have called him their head-and-shoulders boy, for he was at least that much taller than any of the rest. He blushed very much at finding himself among strangers, and chuckled aloud.

"An addition to our little Portico, Toots," said the Doctor; "Mr. Dombey's son."

Young Toots blushed again; and finding, from a solemn silence which prevailed, that he was expected to say something, said to Paul, "How are you?" in a voice so deep, and a manner so sheepish, that if a lamb had roared it couldn't have been more surprising.

"Ask Mr. Feeder, if you please, Toots," said the Doctor, "to prepare a few introductory volumes for Mr. Dombey's son, and to allot him a convenient seat for study. My dear, I believe Mr. Dombey has not seen the dormitories."

"If Mr. Dombey will walk up-stairs," said Mrs. Blimber, "I shall be more than proud to show him the dominions of the drowsy god."

With that Mrs. Blimber, who was a lady of great suavity, and a wiry figure, and who wore a cap composed of sky-blue materials, proceeded up-stairs with Mr. Dombey and Cornelia; Mrs. Pipchin following, and looking out sharp for her enemy the footman.

While they were gone, Paul sat upon the table, holding Florence by the hand, and glancing timidly from the Doctor round and round the room, while the Doctor, leaning back in his chair, with his hand in his breast as usual, held a book from him at arm's length, and read. There was something very awful in this manner of reading. It was such a determined, unimpassioned, inflexible, cold-blooded way of going to work. It left the Doctor's countenance exposed to view; and when the Doctor smiled auspiciously at his author, or knit his brows, or shook his head and made wry faces at him, as much as to say, "Don't tell me, sir; I know better," it was terrific.

Toots, too, had no business to be outside the door, ostentatiously examining the wheels in his watch, and counting his half-crowns. But that didn't last long; for Doctor Blimber, happening to change the position of his tight plump legs, as if he were going to get up, Toots swiftly vanished, and appeared no more.

Mr. Dombey and his conductress were soon heard coming down-stairs again, talking all the way; and presently they re-entered the Doctor's study.

"I hope, Mr. Dombey," said the Doctor, laying down his book, "that the arrangements meet your approval."

"They are excellent, sir," said Mr. Dombey.

"Very fair indeed," said Mrs. Pipchin in a low voice; never disposed to give too much encouragement.

"Mrs. Pipchin," said Mr. Dombey, wheeling round, "will, with your permission, Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, visit Paul now and then."

"Whenever Mrs. Pipchin pleases," observed the Doctor.

"Always happy to see her," said Mrs. Blimber.

"I think," said Mr. Dombey, "I have given all the trouble I need, and may take my leave. Paul, my child,—he went close to him as he sat upon the table,—"good-bye."

"Good-bye, papa."

The limp and careless little hand that Mr. Dombey took in his was singularly out of keeping with the wistful face. But he had no part in its sorrowful expression. It was not ad-

dressed to him. No, no. 'To Florence—all to Florence.

If Mr. Dombey, in his insolence of wealth, had ever made an enemy, hard to appease and cruelly vindictive in his hate, even such an enemy might have received the pang that wrung his proud heart then as compensation for his injury.

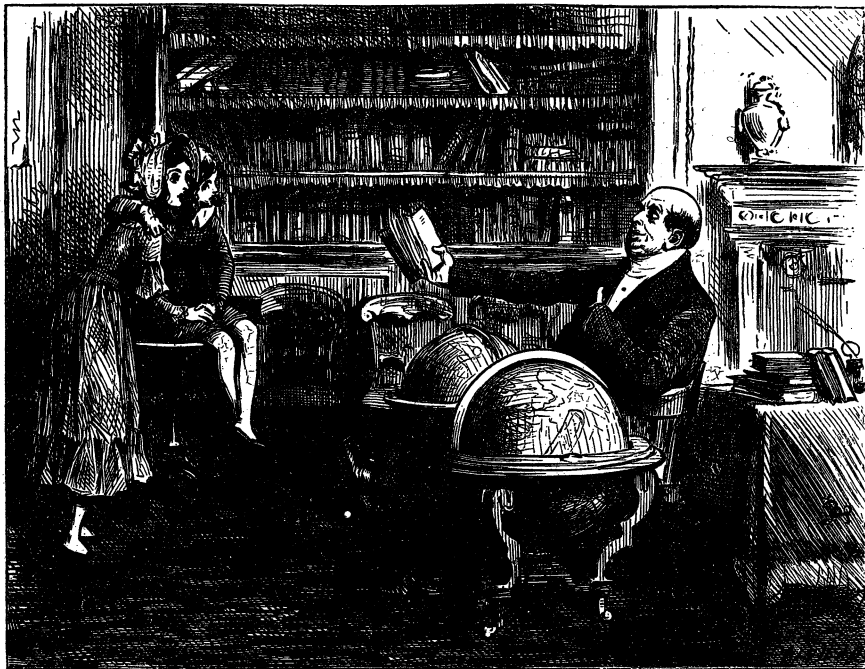
He bent down over his boy, and kissed him. If his sight were dimmed, as he did so, by something that for a moment blurred the little face,

and made it indistinct to him, his mental vision may have been, for that short time, the clearer, perhaps.

"I shall see you soon, Paul. You are free on Saturdays and Sundays, you know."

"Yes, papa," returned Paul: looking at his sister. "On Saturdays and Sundays."

"And you'll try and learn a great deal here, and be a clever man," said Mr. Dombey; "won't you?"



"WHEN THE DOCTOR SMILED AUSPICIOUSLY AT HIS AUTHOR, OR KNIT HIS BROWS, OR SHOOK HIS HEAD AND MADE WRY FACES AT HIM, AS MUCH AS TO SAY, 'DON'T TELL ME, SIR; I KNOW BETTER,' IT WAS TERRIFIC."

"I'll try," returned the child wearily.

"And you'll soon be grown up now!" said Mr. Dombey.

"Oh! very soon!" replied the child. Once more the old, old look passed rapidly across his features like a strange light. It fell on Mrs. Pipchin, and extinguished itself in her black dress. That excellent ogress stepped forward to take leave and to bear off Florence, which she had long been thirsting to do. The move on

her part roused Mr. Dombey, whose eyes were fixed on Paul. After patting him on the head, and pressing his small hand again, he took leave of Doctor Blimber, Mrs. Blimber, and Miss Blimber with his usual polite frigidity, and walked out of the study.

Despite his entreaty that they would not think of stirring, Doctor Blimber, Mrs. Blimber, and Miss Blimber all pressed forward to attend him to the hall; and thus Mrs. Pipchin got into a

state of entanglement with Miss Blimber and the Doctor, and was crowded out of the study before she could clutch Florence. To which happy accident Paul stood afterwards indebted for the dear remembrance, that Florence ran back to throw her arms round his neck, and that hers was the last face in the doorway: turned towards him with a smile of encouragement, the brighter for the tears through which it beamed.

It made his childish bosom heave and swell when it was gone; and sent the globes, the books, blind Homer, and Minerva swimming round the room. But they stopped all of a sudden; and then he heard the loud clock in the hall still gravely inquiring, "How, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?" as it had done before.

He sat, with folded hands, upon his pedestal, silently listening. But he might have answered, "Weary, weary! very lonely, very sad!" And there, with an aching void in his young heart, and all outside so cold, and bare, and strange, Paul sat as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming.

CHAPTER XII.

PAUL'S EDUCATION.

AFTER the lapse of some minutes, which appeared an immense time to little Paul Dombey on the table, Doctor Blimber came back. The Doctor's walk was stately, and calculated to impress the juvenile mind with solemn feelings. It was a sort of march; but when the Doctor put out his right foot, he gravely turned upon his axis, with a semicircular sweep towards the left; and when he put out his left foot, he turned in the same manner towards the right. So that, he seemed, at every stride he took, to look about him as though he were saying, "Can anybody have the goodness to indicate any subject, in any direction, on which I am uninformed? I rather think not."

Mrs. Blimber and Miss Blimber came back in the Doctor's company; and the Doctor, lifting his new pupil off the table, delivered him over to Miss Blimber.

"Cornelia," said the Doctor, "Dombey will be your charge at first. Being him on, Cornelia, bring him on."

Miss Blimber received her young ward from the Doctor's hands; and Paul, feeling that the

spectacles were surveying him; cast down his eyes.

"How old are you, Dombey?" said Miss Blimber.

"Six," answered Paul, wondering, as he stole a glance at the young lady, why her hair didn't grow long like Florence's, and why she was like a boy.

"How much do you know of your Latin Grammar, Dombey?" said Miss Blimber.

"None of it," answered Paul. Feeling that the answer was a shock to Miss Blimber's sensibility, he looked up at the three faces that were looking down at him, and said:

"I haven't been well. I have been a weak child. I couldn't learn a Latin Grammar when I was out, every day, with old Glubb. I wish you'd tell old Glubb to come and see me, if you please."

"What a dreadfully low name!" said Mrs. Blimber. "Unclassical to a degree! Who is the monster, child?"

"What monster?" inquired Paul.

"Glubb," said Mrs. Blimber, with a great relish.

"He's no more a monster than you are," returned Paul.

"What!" cried the Doctor in a terrible voice. "Ay, ay, ay! Aha! What's that?"

Paul was dreadfully frightened; but still he made a stand for the absent Glubb, though he did it trembling.

"He's a very nice old man, ma'am," he said. "He used to draw my couch. He knows all about the deep sea, and the fish that are in it, and the great monsters that come and lie on rocks in the sun, and dive into the water again when they're startled, blowing and splashing so, that they can be heard for miles. There are some creatures," said Paul, warming with his subject, "I don't know how many yards long, and I forget their names, but Florence knows, that pretend to be in distress; and when a man goes near them, out of compassion, they open their great jaws, and attack him. But all he has got to do," said Paul, boldly tendering this information to the very Doctor himself, "is to keep on turning as he runs away, and then, as they turn slowly, because they are so long, and can't bend, he's sure to beat them. And though old Glubb don't know why the sea should make me think of my mamma that's dead, or what it is that it is always saying—always saying!—he knows a great deal about it. And I wish," the child concluded, with a sudden falling of his countenance, and failing in his animation, as he looked like one forlorn upon the three strange

faces, "that you'd let old Glubb come here to see me, for I know him very well, and he knows me."

"Ha!" said the Doctor, shaking his head; "this is bad, but study will do much."

Mrs. Blimber opined, with something like a shiver, that he was an unaccountable child; and, allowing for the difference of visage, looked at him pretty much as Mrs. Pipchin had been used to do.

"Take him round the house, Cornelia," said the Doctor, "and familiarise him with his new sphere. Go with that young lady, Dombey."

Dombey obeyed; giving his hand to the abstruse Cornelia, and looking at her sideways, with timid curiosity, as they went away together. For her spectacles, by reason of the glistening of the glasses, made her so mysterious that he didn't know where she was looking, and was not, indeed, quite sure that she had any eyes at all behind them.

Cornelia took him first to the schoolroom, which was situated at the back of the hall, and was approached through two baize doors, which deadened and muffled the young gentlemen's voices. Here there were eight young gentlemen in various stages of mental prostration, all very hard at work, and very grave indeed. Toots, as an old hand, had a desk to himself in one corner: and a magnificent man, of immense age, he looked, in Paul's young eyes, behind it.

Mr. Feeder, B.A., who sat at another little desk, had his Virgil stop on, and was slowly grinding that tune to four young gentlemen. Of the remaining four, two, who grasped their foreheads convulsively, were engaged in solving mathematical problems; one with his face like a dirty window, from much crying, was endeavouring to flounder through a hopeless number of lines before dinner; and one sat looking at his task in stony stupefaction and despair—which it seemed had been his condition ever since breakfast-time.

The appearance of a new boy did not create the sensation that might have been expected. Mr. Feeder, B.A. (who was in the habit of shaving his head for coolness, and had nothing but little bristles on it), gave him a bony hand, and told him he was glad to see him—which Paul would have been very glad to have told *him*, if he could have done so with the least sincerity. Then Paul, instructed by Cornelia, shook hands with the four young gentlemen at Mr. Feeder's desk; then with the two young gentlemen at work on the problems, who were very feverish; then with the young gentleman at work against time, who was very inky; and

lastly, with the young gentleman in a state of stupefaction, who was flabby and quite cold.

Paul having been already introduced to Toots, that pupil merely chuckled and breathed hard, as his custom was, and pursued the occupation in which he was engaged. It was not a severe one; for, on account of his having "gone through" so much (in more senses than one), and also of his having, as before hinted, let off blowing in his prime, Toots now had licence to pursue his own course of study; which was chiefly to write long letters to himself from persons of distinction, addressed "P. Toots, Esquire, Brighton, Sussex," and to preserve them in his desk with great care.

These ceremonies passed, Cornelia led Paul up-stairs to the top of the house; which was rather a slow journey, on account of Paul being obliged to land both feet on every stair before he mounted another. But they reached their journey's end at last; and there, in a front room, looking over the wild sea, Cornelia showed him a nice little bed with white hangings, close to the window, on which there was already beautifully written on a card in round text—down strokes very thick, and up strokes very fine—*DOMBEY*; while two other little bedsteads in the same room were announced, through like means, as respectively appertaining unto *BRIGGS* and *TÖZER*.

Just as they got down-stairs again into the hall, Paul saw the weak-eyed young man, who had given that mortal offence to Mrs. Pipchin, suddenly seize a very large drum-stick, and fly at a gong that was hanging up, as if he had gone mad, or wanted vengeance. Instead of receiving warning, however, or being instantly taken into custody, the young man left off unchecked, after having made a dreadful noise. Then Cornelia Blimber said to Dombey that dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour, and perhaps he had better go into the schoolroom among his "friends."

So Dombey, deferentially passing the great clock, which was still as anxious as ever to know how he found himself, opened the schoolroom door a very little way, and strayed in like a lost boy: shutting it after him with some difficulty. His friends were all dispersed about the room except the stony friend, who remained immovable. Mr. Feeder was stretching himself in his grey gown, as if, regardless of expense, he were resolved to pull the sleeves off.

"Heigh ho hum!" cried Mr. Feeder, shaking himself like a cart-horse. "Oh dear me, dear me! Ya-a-a-ah!"

Paul was quite alarmed by Mr. Feeder's

yawning; it was done on such a great scale, and he was so terribly in earnest. All the boys, too (Toots excepted), seemed knocked up, and were getting ready for dinner—some newly tying their neckcloths, which were very stiff indeed; and others washing their hands, or brushing their hair, in an adjoining ante-chamber—as if they didn't think they should enjoy it at all.

Young Toots, who was ready beforehand, and had therefore nothing to do, and had leisure to bestow upon Paul, said, with heavy good-nature:

"Sit down, Dombey."

"Thank you, sir," said Paul.

His endeavouring to hoist himself on to a very high window-seat, and his slipping down again, appeared to prepare Toots's mind for the reception of a discovery.

"You're a very small chap," said Mr. Toots.

"Yes, sir, I'm small," returned Paul. "Thank you, sir."

For Toots had lifted him into his seat, and done it kindly too.

"Who's your tailor?" inquired Toots, after looking at him for some moments.

"It's a woman that has made my clothes as yet," said Paul. "My sister's dressmaker."

"My tailor's Burgess and Co.," said Toots. "Fashionable. But very dear."

Paul had wit enough to shake his head, as if he would have said it was easy to see *that*; and, indeed, he thought so.

"Your father's regularly rich, ain't he?" inquired Mr. Toots.

"Yes, sir," said Paul. "He's Dombey and Son."

"And which?" demanded Toots.

"And Son, sir," replied Paul.

Mr. Toots made one or two attempts, in a low voice, to fix the firm in his mind; but not quite succeeding, said he would get Paul to mention the name again to-morrow morning, as it was rather important. And, indeed, he purposed nothing less than writing himself a private and confidential letter from Dombey and Son immediately.

By this time the other pupils (always excepting the stony boy) gathered round. They were polite, but pale; and spoke low; and they were so depressed in their spirits, that, in comparison with the general tone of that company, Master Bitherstone was a perfect Miller, or complete Jest Book. And yet he had a sense of injury upon him too, had Bitherstone.

"You sleep in my room, don't you?" asked a solemn young gentleman, whose shirt collar curled up the lobes of his ears.

"Master Briggs?" inquired Paul.

"Tozer," said the young gentleman.

Paul answered yes; and Tozer, pointing out the stony pupil, said that was Briggs. Paul had already felt certain that it must be either Briggs or Tozer, though he didn't know why.

"Is yours a strong constitution?" inquired Tozer.

Paul said he thought not. Tozer replied that *he* thought not also, judging from Paul's looks, and that it was a pity, for it need be. He then asked Paul if he were going to begin with Cornelia; and, on Paul saying "Yes," all the young gentlemen (Briggs excepted) gave a low groan.

It was drowned in the tintinnabulation of the gong, which sounding again with great fury, there was a general move towards the dining-room; still excepting Briggs, the stony boy, who remained where he was, and as he was; and on its way to whom Paul presently encountered a round of bread, genteelly served on a plate and napkin, and with a silver fork lying crosswise on the top of it. Doctor Blimber was already in his place in the dining-room, at the top of the table, with Miss Blimber and Mrs. Blimber on either side of him. Mr. Feeder, in a black coat, was at the bottom. Paul's chair was next to Miss Blimber; but it being found, when he sat in it, that his eyebrows were not much above the level of the table-cloth, some books were brought in from the Doctor's study, on which he was elevated, and on which he always sat from that time—carrying them in and out himself, on after occasions, like a little elephant and castle.

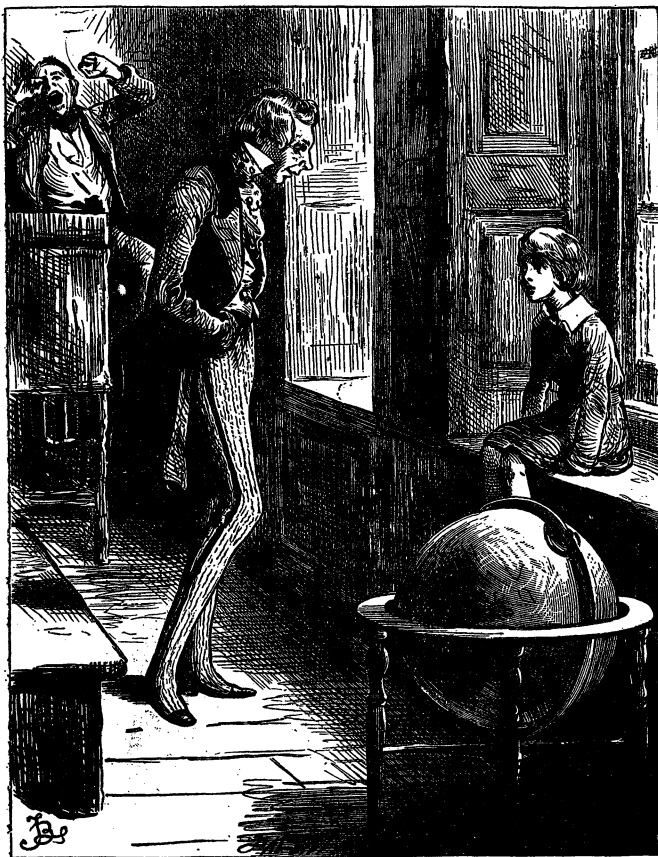
Grace having been said by the Doctor, dinner began. There was some nice soup; also roast meat, boiled meat, vegetables, pie, and cheese. Every young gentleman had a massive silver fork and a napkin; and all the arrangements were stately and handsome. In particular, there was a butler in a blue coat and bright buttons, who gave quite a winy flavour to the table beer; he poured it out so superbly.

Nobody spoke, unless spoken to, except Doctor Blimber, Mrs. Blimber, and Miss Blimber, who conversed occasionally. Whenever a young gentleman was not actually engaged with his knife and fork or spoon, his eye, with an irresistible attraction, sought the eye of Doctor Blimber, Mrs. Blimber, or Miss Blimber, and modestly rested there. Toots appeared to be the only exception to this rule. He sat next Mr. Feeder, on Paul's side of the table, and frequently looked behind and before the intervening boys to catch a glimpse of Paul.

Only once during dinner was there any conversation that included the young gentlemen. It happened at the epoch of the cheese, when the Doctor, having taken a glass of port wine, and hemmed twice or thrice, said :

"It is remarkable, Mr. Feeder, that the Romans——"

At the mention of this terrible people, their implacable enemies, every young gentleman fastened his gaze upon the Doctor, with an



"YOUR FATHER'S REGULARLY RICH, AIN'T HE?" INQUIRED MR. TOOTS.
 "YES, SIR," SAID PAUL. "HE'S DOMBEY AND SON."

assumption of the deepest interest. One of the number, who happened to be drinking, and who caught the Doctor's eye glaring at him through the side of his tumbler, left off so hastily that he was convulsed for some moments, and in the sequel ruined Doctor Blimber's point.

DOMBEY AND SON, 6.

"It is remarkable, Mr. Feeder," said the Doctor, beginning again slowly, "that the Romans, in those gorgeous and profuse entertainments of which we read in the days of the Emperors, when luxury had attained a height unknown before or since, and when whole pro-

vinces ~~were~~ ravaged to supply the splendid means of one imperial banquet——”

Here the offender, who had been swelling and straining, and waiting in vain for a full stop, broke out violently.

“Johnson,” said Mr. Feeder in a low reproachful voice, “take some water.”

The Doctor, looking very stern, made a pause until the water was brought, and then resumed :

“And when, Mr. Feeder——”

But Mr. Feeder, who saw that Johnson must break out again, and who knew that the Doctor would never come to a period before the young gentlemen until he had finished all he meant to say, couldn't keep his eye off Johnson ; and thus was caught in the fact of not looking at the Doctor, who consequently stopped.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Mr. Feeder, reddening. “I beg your pardon, Doctor Blimber.”

“And when,” said the Doctor, raising his voice, “when, sir, as we read, and have no reason to doubt—incredible as it may appear to the vulgar of our time—the brother of Vitellius prepared for him a feast, in which were served, of fish, two thousand dishes——”

“Take some water, Johnson—dishes, sir,” said Mr. Feeder.

“Of various sorts of fowl, five thousand dishes——”

“Or try a crust of bread,” said Mr. Feeder.

“And one dish,” pursued Doctor Blimber, raising his voice still higher as he looked all round the table, “called, from its enormous dimensions, the Shield of Minerva, and made, among other costly ingredients, of the brains of pheasants——”

“Ow, ow, ow !” (from Johnson.)

“Woodeocks——”

“Ow, ow, ow !”

“The sounds of the fish called scari——”

“You'll burst some vessel in your head,” said Mr. Feeder. “You had better let it come.”

“And the spawn of the lamprey, brought from the Carpathian Sea,” pursued the Doctor in his severest voice ; “when we read of costly entertainments such as these, and still remember that we have a Titus——”

“What would be your mother's feelings if you died of apoplexy !” said Mr. Feeder.

“A Domitian——”

“And you're blue, you know,” said Mr. Feeder.

“A Nero, a Tiberius, a Caligula, a Heliogabalus, and many more,” pursued the Doctor ; “it is, Mr. Feeder—if you are doing me the honour to attend—remarkable ; very remarkable, sir——”

But Johnson, unable to suppress it any longer, burst at that moment into such an overwhelming fit of coughing, that, although both his immediate neighbours thumped him on the back, and Mr. Feeder himself held a glass of water to his lips, and the butler walked him up and down several times between his own chair and the sideboard, like a sentry, it was full five minutes before he was moderately composed, and then there was a profound silence.

“Gentlemen,” said Doctor Blimber, “rise for Grace ! Cornelia, lift Dombey down”——nothing of whom but his scalp was accordingly seen above the table-cloth. “Johnson will repeat to me to-morrow morning before breakfast, without book, and from the Greek Testament, the first chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. We will resume our studies, Mr. Feeder, in half an hour.”

The young gentlemen bowed and withdrew. Mr. Feeder did likewise. During the half-hour, the young gentlemen, broken into pairs, loitered arm-in-arm up and down a small piece of ground behind the house, or endeavoured to kindle a spark of animation in the breast of Briggs. But nothing happened so vulgar as play. Punctually, at the appointed time, the gong was sounded, and the studies, under the joint auspices of Doctor Blimber and Mr. Feeder, were resumed.

As the Olympic game of lounging up and down had been cut shorter than usual that day, on Johnson's account, they all went out for a walk before tea. Even Briggs (though he hadn't begun yet) partook of this dissipation ; in the enjoyment of which he looked over the cliff two or three times darkly. Doctor Blimber accompanied them ; and Paul had the honour of being taken in tow by the Doctor himself : a distinguished state of things, in which he looked very little and feeble.

Tea was served in a style no less polite than the dinner ; and after tea, the young gentlemen, rising and bowing as before, withdrew to fetch up the unfinished tasks of that day, or to get up the already looming tasks of to-morrow. In the meantime Mr. Feeder withdrew to his own room ; and Paul sat in a corner, wondering whether Florence was thinking of him, and what they were all about at Mrs. Pipchin's.

Mr. Toots, who had been detained by an important letter from the Duke of Wellington, found Paul out after a time ; and having looked at him for a long while, as before, inquired if he was fond of waistcoats.

Paul said “Yes, sir.”

“So am I,” said Toots.

No word more spake Toots that night ; but he stood looking at Paul as if he liked him ; and as there was company in that, and Paul was not inclined to talk, it answered his purpose better than conversation.

At eight o'clock or so, the gong sounded again for prayers in the dining-room, where the butler afterwards presided over a side-table, on which bread and cheese and beer were spread for such young gentlemen as desired to partake of those refreshments. The ceremonies concluded by the Doctor's saying, "Gentlemen, we will resume our studies at seven-to-morrow;" and then, for the first time, Paul saw Cornelia Blimber's eye, and saw that it was upon him. When the Doctor had said these words, "Gentlemen, we will resume our studies at seven-to-morrow," the pupils bowed again, and went to bed.

In the confidence of their own room up-stairs, Briggs said his head ached ready to split, and that he should wish himself dead if it wasn't for his mother, and a blackbird he had at home. Tozer didn't say much, but he sighed a good deal, and told Paul to look out, for his turn would come to-morrow. After uttering those prophetic words, he undressed himself moodily, and got into bed. Briggs was in his bed too, and Paul in his bed too, before the weak-eyed young man appeared to take away the candle, when he wished them good night and pleasant dreams. But his benevolent wishes were in vain as far as Briggs and Tozer were concerned ; for Paul, who lay awake for a long while, and often woke afterwards, found that Briggs was ridden by his lesson as a nightmare ; and that Tozer, whose mind was affected in his sleep by similar causes, in a minor degree, talked unknown tongues, or scraps of Greek and Latin—it was all one to Paul—which, in the silence of night, had an inexpressibly wicked and guilty effect.

Paul had sunk into a sweet sleep, and dreamed that he was walking hand-in-hand with Florence through beautiful gardens, when they came to a large sunflower which suddenly expanded itself into a gong, and began to sound. Opening his eyes, he found that it was a dark, windy morning, with a drizzling rain ; and that the real gong was giving dreadful note of preparation, down in the hall.

So he got up directly, and found Briggs with hardly any eyes, for nightmare and grief had made his face puffy, putting his boots on : while Tozer stood shivering and rubbing his shoulders in a very bad humour. Poor Paul couldn't dress himself easily, not being used to it, and asked them if they would have the goodness to tie some strings for him ; but, as Briggs merely

said "Bother !" and Tozer, "Oh yes !" he went down, when he was otherwise ready, to the next story, where he saw a pretty young woman in leather gloves cleaning a stove. The young woman seemed surprised at his appearance, and asked him where his mother was. When Paul told her she was dead, she took her gloves off, and did what he wanted ; and furthermore rubbed his hands to warm them ; and gave him a kiss ; and told him whenever he wanted anything of that sort—meaning in the dressing way—to ask for Melia ; which Paul, thanking her very much, said he certainly would. He then proceeded softly on his journey down-stairs, towards the room in which the young gentlemen resumed their studies, when, passing by a door that stood ajar, a voice from within cried, "Is that Dombey ?" On Paul replying, "Yes, ma'am !" for he knew the voice to be Miss Blimber's : Miss Blimber said, "Come in, Dombey." And in he went.

Miss Blimber presented exactly the appearance she had presented yesterday, except that she wore a shawl. Her little light curls were as crisp as ever, and she had already her spectacles on, which made Paul wonder whether she went to bed in them. She had a cool little sitting-room of her own up there, with some books in it, and no fire. But Miss Blimber was never cold, and never sleepy.

"Now, Dombey," said Miss Blimber, "I'm going out for a constitutional."

Paul wondered what that was, and why she didn't send the footman out to get it in such unfavourable weather. But he made no observation on the subject ; his attention being devoted to a little pile of new books, on which Miss Blimber appeared to have been recently engaged.

"These are yours, Dombey," said Miss Blimber.

"All of 'em, ma'am ?" said Paul.

"Yes," returned Miss Blimber ; "and Mr. Feeder will look you out some more very soon, if you are as studious as I expect you will be, Dombey."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Paul.

"I am going out for a constitutional," resumed Miss Blimber ; "and while I am gone, that is to say, in the interval between this and breakfast, Dombey, I wish you to read over what I have marked in these books, and to tell me if you quite understand what you have got to learn. Don't lose time, Dombey, for you have none to spare, but take them down-stairs, and begin directly."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Paul.

There were so many of them, that although Paul put one hand under the bottom book, and his other hand and his chin on the top book, and hugged them all closely, the middle book slipped out before he reached the door, and then they all tumbled down on the floor. Miss Blimber said, "Oh, Dombey, Dombey, this is really very careless!" and piled them up afresh for him; and this time, by dint of balancing them with great nicety, Paul got out of the room, and down a few stairs, before two of them escaped again. But he held the rest so tight, that he only left one more on the first floor, and one in the passage; and when he had got the main body down into the schoolroom, he set off upstairs again to collect the stragglers. Having at last amassed the whole library, and climbed into his place, he fell to work, encouraged by a remark from Tozer to the effect that he "was in for it now;" which was the only interruption he received till breakfast-time. At that meal, for which he had no appetite, everything was quite as solemn and genteel as at the others; and when it was finished, he followed Miss Blimber up-stairs.

"Now, Dombey," said Miss Blimber, "how have you got on with those books?"

They comprised a little English, and a deal of Latin—names of things, declensions of articles and substantives, exercises thereon, and preliminary rules—a trifle of orthography, a glance at ancient history, a wink or two at modern ditto, a few tables, two or three weights and measures, and a little general information. When poor Paul had spelt out number two, he found he had no idea of number one; fragments whereof afterwards obtruded themselves into number three, which slid into number four, which grafted itself on to number two. So that whether twenty Romuluses made a Remus, or *hic hæc hoc* was troy weight, or a verb always agreed with an ancient Briton, or three times four was Taurus a bull, were open questions with him.

"Oh, Dombey, Dombey!" said Miss Blimber, "this is very shocking."

"If you please," said Paul, "I think, if I might sometimes talk a little to old Glubb, I should be able to do better."

"Nonsense, Dombey," said Miss Blimber. "I couldn't hear of it. This is not the place for Glubbs of any kind. You must take the books down, I suppose, Dombey, one by one, and perfect yourself in the day's instalment of subject A, before you turn at all to subject B. And now take away the top book, if you please, Dombey, and return when you are master of the theme."

Miss Blimber expressed her opinions on the subject of Paul's uninstructed state with a gloomy delight, as if she had expected this result, and were glad to find that they must be in constant communication. Paul withdrew with the top task, as he was told, and laboured away at it down below; sometimes remembering every word of it, and sometimes forgetting it all, and everything else besides: until at last he ventured up-stairs again to repeat the lesson, when it was nearly all driven out of his head before he began, by Miss Blimber's shutting up the book, and saying, "Go on, Dombey!" a proceeding so suggestive of the knowledge inside of her, that Paul looked upon the young lady with consternation, as a kind of learned Guy Fawkes, or artificial Bogle, stuffed full of scholastic straw.

He acquitted himself very well, nevertheless; and Miss Blimber, commending him as giving promise of getting on fast, immediately provided him with subject B; from which he passed to C, and even D before dinner. It was hard work, resuming his studies soon after dinner; and he felt giddy and confused, and drowsy and dull. But all the other young gentlemen had similar sensations, and were obliged to resume their studies too, if there were any comfort in that. It was a wonder that the great clock in the hall, instead of being constant to its first inquiry, never said, "Gentlemen, we will now resume our studies," for that phrase was often enough repeated in its neighbourhood. The studies went round like a mighty wheel, and the young gentlemen were always stretched upon it.

After tea there were exercises again, and preparations for next day by candle-light. And in due course there was bed: where, but for that resumption of the studies which took place in dreams, were rest and sweet forgetfulness.

Oh, Saturdays! Oh, happy Saturdays, when Florence always came at noon, and never would, in any weather, stay away, though Mrs. Pipchin snarled and growled, and worried her bitterly. Those Saturdays were Sabbaths for at least two little Christians among all the Jews, and did the holy Sabbath work of strengthening and knitting up a brother's and a sister's love.

Not even Sunday nights—the heavy Sunday nights, whose shadow darkened the first waking burst of light on Sunday mornings—could mar those precious Saturdays. Whether it was the great seashore, where they sat and strolled together; or whether it was only Mrs. Pipchin's dull back-room, in which she sang to him so softly, with his drowsy head upon her arm; Paul never cared. It was Florence. That was all he thought of. So, on Sunday nights, when the

Doctor's dark door stood agape to swallow him up for another week, the time was come for taking leave of Florence; no one else.

Mrs. Wickam had been drafted home to the house in town, and Miss Nipper, now a smart young woman, had come down. To many a single combat with Mrs. Pipchin did Miss Nipper gallantly devote herself; and if ever Mrs. Pipchin in all her life had found her match, she had found it now. Miss Nipper threw away the scabbard the first morning she arose in Mrs. Pipchin's house. She asked and gave no quarter. She said it must be war, and war it was; and Mrs. Pipchin lived from that time in the midst of surprises, harassings, and defiance; and skirmishing attacks that came bouncing in upon her from the passage, even in ungarded moments of chops, and carried desolation to her very toast.

Miss Nipper had returned one Sunday night with Florence, from walking back with Paul to the Doctor's, when Florence took from her bosom a little piece of paper, on which she had pencilled down some words.

"See here, Susan," she said. "These are the names of the little books that Paul brings home to do those long exercises with, when he is so tired. I copied them last night while he was writing."

"Don't show 'em to me, Miss Floy, if you please," returned Nipper; "I'd as soon see Mrs. Pipchin."

"I want you to buy them for me, Susan, if you will, to-morrow morning. I have money enough," said Florence.

"Why, goodness gracious me, Miss Floy," returned Miss Nipper, "how can you talk like that, when you have books upon books already, and masteres and misseses a teaching of you everything continual, though my belief is that your pa, Miss Dombey, never would have learnt you nothing, never would have thought of it, unless you'd asked him—when he couldn't well refuse; but giving consent when asked, and offering when unasked, miss, is quite two things; I may not have my objections to a young man's keeping company with me, and when he puts the question, may say 'Yes,' but that's not saying, 'Would you be so kind as like me?'"

"But you can buy me the books, Susan; and you will, when you know I want them."

"Well, miss, and why do you want 'em?" replied Nipper; adding, in a lower voice, "If it was to fling at Mrs. Pipchin's head, I'd buy a cart-load."

"I think I could perhaps give Paul some help, Susan, if I had these books," said Florence, "and make the coming week a little easier to

him. At least I want to try. So buy them for me, dear, and I will never forget how kind it was of you to do it!"

It must have been a harder heart than Susan Nipper's that could have rejected the little purse Florence held out with these words, or the gentle look of entreaty with which she seconded her petition. Susan put the purse in her pocket without reply, and trotted out at once upon her errand.

The books were not easy to procure; and the answer at several shops was, either that they were just out of them, or that they never kept them, or that they had had a great many last month, or that they expected a great many next week. But Susan was not easily baffled in such an enterprise; and having entrapped a white-haired youth, in a black calico apron, from a library where she was known, to accompany her in her quest, she led him such a life in going up and down, that he exerted himself to the utmost, if it were only to get rid of her; and finally enabled her to return home in triumph.

With these treasures, then, after her own daily lessons were over, Florence sat down at night to track Paul's footsteps through the thorny ways of learning; and being possessed of a naturally quick and sound capacity, and taught by that most wonderful of masters, love, it was not long before she gained upon Paul's heels, and caught and passed him.

Not a word of this was breathed to Mrs. Pipchin: but many a night when they were all in bed, and when Miss Nipper, with her hair in papers and herself asleep in some uncomfortable attitude, reposed unconscious by her side; and when the chinking ashes in the grate were cold and grey; and when the candles were burnt down and guttering out; Florence tried so hard to be a substitute for one small Dombey, that her fortitude and perseverance might have almost won her a free right to bear the name herself.

And high was her reward, when one Saturday evening, as little Paul was sitting down as usual to "resume his studies," she sat down by his side, and showed him all that was so rough, made smooth, and all that was so dark, made clear and plain, before him. It was nothing but a startled look in Paul's wan face—a flush—a smile—and then a close embrace—but God knows how her heart leaped up at this rich payment for her trouble.

"Oh, Floy!" cried her brother, "how I love you! How I love you, Floy!"

"And I you, dear!"

"Oh! I am sure of that, Floy!"

He said no more about it, but all that evening sat close by her, very quiet; and in the night he called out from his little room within hers, three or four times, that he loved her.

Regularly, after that, Florence was prepared to sit down with Paul on Saturday night, and patiently assist him through so much as they could anticipate together of his next week's work. The cheering thought that he was labouring on where Florence had just toiled before him would, of itself, have been a stimulant to Paul in the perpetual resumption of his studies; but, coupled with the actual lightening of his load, consequent on this assistance, it saved him, possibly, from sinking underneath the burden which the fair Cornelia Blimber piled upon his back.

It was not that Miss Blimber meant to be too hard upon him, or that Doctor Blimber meant to bear too heavily on the young gentlemen in general. Cornelia merely held the faith in which she had been bred; and the Doctor, in some partial confusion of his ideas, regarded the young gentlemen as if they were all Doctors, and were born grown up. Comforted by the applause of the young gentlemen's nearest relations, and urged on by their blind vanity and ill-considered haste, it would have been strange if Doctor Blimber had discovered his mistake, or trimmed his swelling sails to any other tack.

Thus in the case of Paul. When Doctor Blimber said he made great progress, and was naturally clever, Mr. Dombey was more bent than ever on his being forced and crammed. In the case of Briggs, when Doctor Blimber reported that he did not make great progress yet, and was not naturally clever, Briggs senior was inexorable in the same purpose. In short, however high and false the temperature at which the Doctor kept his hothouse, the owners of the plants were always ready to lend a helping hand at the bellows, and to stir the fire.

Such spirits as he had in the outset, Paul soon lost, of course. But he retained all that was strange, and old, and thoughtful in his character: and, under circumstances so favourable to the development of those tendencies, became even more strange, and old, and thoughtful than before.

The only difference was, that he kept his character to himself. He grew more thoughtful and reserved every day; and had no such curiosity in any living member of the Doctor's household as he had had in Mrs. Pipchin. He loved to be alone; and, in those short intervals when he was not occupied with his books, liked nothing so well as wandering about the house

by himself, or sitting on the stairs, listening to the great clock in the hall. He was intimate with all the paper-hanging in the house; saw things that no one else saw in the patterns; found out miniature tigers and lions running up the bedroom walls, and squinting faces leering in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth.

The solitary child lived on, surrounded by this arabesque work of his musing fancy, and no one understood him. Mrs. Blimber thought him "odd," and sometimes the servants said among themselves that little Dombey "moped;" but that was all.

Unless young Toots had some idea on the subject, to the expression of which he was wholly unequal. Ideas, like ghosts (according to the common notion of ghosts), must be spoken to a little before they will explain themselves; and Toots had long left off asking any questions of his own mind. Some mist there may have been, issuing from that leaden casket, his cranium, which, if it could have taken shape and form, would have become a genie; but it could not; and it only so far followed the example of the smoke in the Arabian story as to roll out in a thick cloud, and there hang and hover. But it left a little figure visible upon a lonely shore, and Toots was always staring at it.

"How are you?" he would say to Paul fifty times a day.

"Quite well, sir, thank you," Paul would answer.

"Shake hands," would be Toots's next advance.

Which Paul, of course, would immediately do. Mr. Toots generally said again, after a long interval of staring and hard breathing, "How are you?" To which Paul again replied, "Quite well, sir, thank you."

One evening Mr. Toots was sitting at his desk, oppressed by correspondence, when a great purpose seemed to flash upon him. He laid down his pen, and went off to seek Paul, whom he found at last, after a long search, looking through the window of his little bedroom.

"I say!" cried Toots, speaking the moment he entered the room, lest he should forget it; "what do you think about?"

"Oh! I think about a great many things," replied Paul.

"Do you, though?" said Toots, appearing to consider that fact in itself surprising.

"If you had to die——" said Paul, looking up into his face.

Mr. Toots started, and seemed much disturbed.

"—Don't you think you would rather die on a moonlight night, when the sky was quite clear, and the wind blowing, as it did last night?"

Mr. Toots said, looking doubtfully at Paul, and shaking his head, that he didn't know about that.

"Not blowing, at least," said Paul, "but sounding in the air like the sea sounds in the shells. It was a beautiful night. When I had listened to the water for a long time, I got up and looked out. There was a boat over there, in the full light of the moon; a boat with a sail."

The child looked at him so steadfastly, and spoke so earnestly, that Mr. Toots, feeling himself called upon to say something about this boat, said, "Smugglers." But, with an impartial remembrance of there being two sides to every question, he added, "or Preventive."

"A boat with a sail," repeated Paul, "in the full light of the moon. The sail like an arm, all silver. It went away into the distance, and what do you think it seemed to do as it moved with the waves?"

"Pitch," said Mr. Toots.

"It seemed to beckon," said the child, "to beckon me to come!—There she is! There she is!"

Toots was almost beside himself with dismay at this sudden exclamation, after what had gone before, and cried, "Who?"

"My sister Florence!" cried Paul, "looking up here, and waving her hand. She sees me—she sees me! Good night, dear, good night, good night!"

His quick transition to a state of unbounded pleasure, as he stood at his window, kissing and clapping his hands: and the way in which the light retreated from his features as she passed out of his view, and left a patient melancholy on the little face: were too remarkable wholly to escape even Toots's notice. Their interview being interrupted at this moment by a visit from Mrs. Pipchin, who usually brought her black skirts to bear upon Paul just before dusk, once or twice a week, Toots had no opportunity of improving the occasion: but it left so marked an impression on his mind, that he twice returned, after having exchanged the usual salutations, to ask Mrs. Pipchin how she did. This the irascible old lady conceived to be a deeply-devised and long-meditated insult, originating in the diabolical invention of the weak-eyed young man down-stairs; against whom she accordingly lodged a formal complaint with Doctor Blimber that very night; who mentioned to the young man that if he ever did it again, he should be obliged to part with him.

The evenings being longer now, Paul stole up to his window every evening to look out for Florence. She always passed and repassed at a certain time until she saw him; and their mutual recognition was a gleam of sunshine in Paul's daily life. Often, after dark, one other figure walked alone before the Doctor's house. He rarely joined them on the Saturday now. He could not bear it. He would rather come unrecognised, and look up at the windows where his son was qualifying for a man; and wait, and watch, and plan, and hope.

Oh! could he but have seen, or seen as others did, the slight, spare boy above, watching the waves and clouds at twilight with his earnest eyes, and breasting the window of his solitary cage when birds flew by, as if he would have emulated them, and soared away!

CHAPTER XIII.

SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE AND OFFICE BUSINESS.

MR. DOMBEY'S offices were in a court where there was an old-established stall of choice fruit at the corner: where perambulating merchants, of both sexes, offered for sale, at any time between the hours of ten and five, slippers, pocket-books, sponges, dogs' collars, and Windsor soap; and sometimes a pointer or an oil-painting.

The pointer always came that way, with a view to the Stock Exchange, where a sporting taste (originating generally in bets of new hats) is much in vogue. The other commodities were addressed to the general public; but they were never offered by the vendors to Mr. Dombey. When he appeared, the dealers in those wares fell off respectfully. The principal slipper and dog's-collar man—who considered himself a public character, and whose portrait was screwed on to an artist's door in Cheapside—threw up his forefinger to the brim of his hat as Mr. Dombey went by. The ticket porter, if he were not absent on a job, always ran officiously before, to open Mr. Dombey's office door as wide as possible, and hold it open, with his hat off, while he entered.

The clerks within were not a whit behindhand in their demonstrations of respect. A solemn hush prevailed as Mr. Dombey passed through the outer office. The wit of the Counting-house became, in a moment, as mute as the row of

leathern fire-buckets hanging up behind him. Such vivid and flat daylight as filtered through the ground-glass windows and sky-lights, leaving a black sediment upon the panes, showed the books and papers, and the figures bending over them, enveloped in a studious gloom, and as much abstracted, in appearance, from the world without, as if they were assembled at the bottom of the sea; while a mouldy little strong-room in the obscure perspective, where a shaded lamp was always burning, might have represented the cavern of some ocean monster, looking on with a red eye at these mysteries of the deep.

When Perch, the messenger, whose place was on a little bracket, like a time-piece, saw Mr. Dombey come in—or rather, when he felt that he was coming, for he had usually an instinctive sense of his approach—he hurried into Mr. Dombey's room, stirred the fire, quarried fresh coals from the bowels of the coal-box, hung the newspaper to air upon the fender, put the chair ready, and the screen in its place, and was round upon his heel on the instant of Mr. Dombey's entrance, to take his great-coat and hat, and hang them up. Then Perch took the newspaper, and gave it a turn or two in his hands before the fire, and laid it, deferentially, at Mr. Dombey's elbow. And so little objection had Perch to doing deferential in the last degree, that if he might have laid himself at Mr. Dombey's feet, or might have called him by some such title as used to be bestowed upon the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, he would have been all the better pleased.

As this honour would have been an innovation and an experiment, Perch was fain to content himself by expressing as well as he could, in his manner, You are the Light of my Eyes. You are the Breath of my Soul. You are the Commander of the Faithful Perch! With this imperfect happiness to cheer him, he would shut the door softly, walk away on tiptoe, and leave the great chief to be stared at, through a dome-shaped window in the leads, by ugly chimney-pots and backs of houses, and especially by the bold window of a hair-cutting saloon on a first floor, where a waxen effigy, bald as a Mussulman in the morning, and covered, after eleven o'clock in the day, with luxuriant hair and whiskers in the latest Christian fashion, showed him the wrong side of its head for ever.

Between Mr. Dombey and the common world, as it was accessible through the medium of the outer office—to which Mr. Dombey's presence in his own room may be said to have struck like damp, or cold air—there were two degrees of descent, Mr. Carker, in his own office, was the

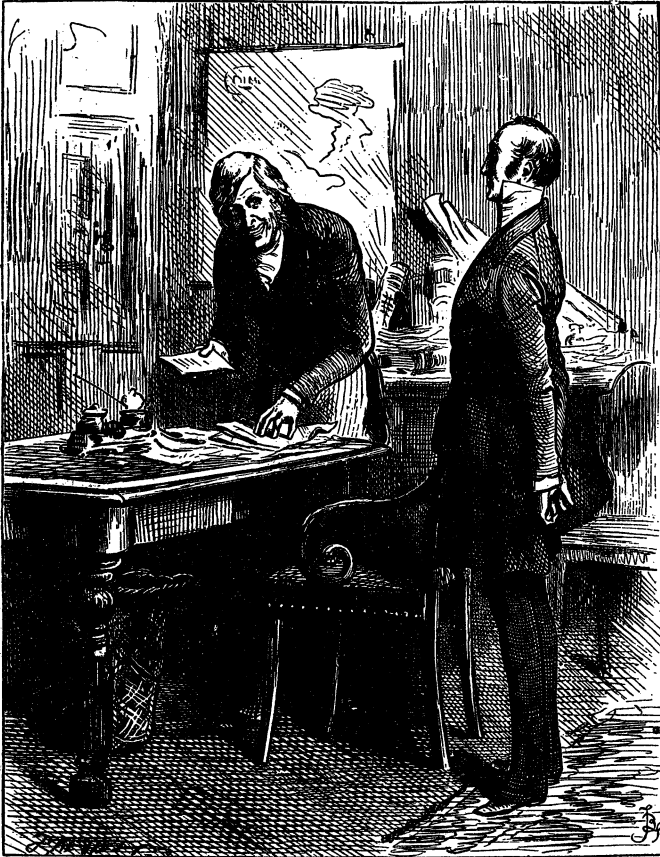
first step; Mr. Morfin, in *his* own office, was the second. Each of these gentlemen occupied a little chamber like a bath-room, opening from the passage outside Mr. Dombey's door. Mr. Carker, as Grand Vizier, inhabited the room that was nearest to the Sultan. Mr. Morfin, as an officer of inferior state, inhabited the room that was nearest to the clerks.

The gentleman last mentioned was a cheerful-looking, hazel-eyed, elderly bachelor; gravely attired, as to his upper man, in black; and as to his legs, in pepper-and-salt colour. His dark hair was just touched here and there with specks of grey, as though the tread of Time had splashed it; and his whiskers were already white. He had a mighty respect for Mr. Dombey, and rendered him due homage; but as he was of a genial temper himself, and never wholly at his ease in that stately presence, he was disquieted by no jealousy of the many conferences enjoyed by Mr. Carker, and felt a secret satisfaction in having duties to discharge which rarely exposed him to be singled out for such distinction. He was a great musical amateur in his way—after business; and had a paternal affection for his violoncello, which was once in every week transported from Islington, his place of abode, to a certain club-room hard by the Bank, where quartets of the most tormenting and excruciating nature were executed every Wednesday evening by a private party. Mr. Carker was a gentleman thirty-eight or forty years old, of a florid complexion, and with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke; and bore so wide a smile upon his countenance (a smile, however, very rarely indeed extending beyond his mouth), that there was something in it like the snarl of a cat. He affected a stiff white cravat, after the example of his principal, and was always closely buttoned up and tightly dressed. His manner towards Mr. Dombey was deeply conceived and perfectly expressed. He was familiar with him, in the very extremity of his sense of the distance between them. "Mr. Dombey, to a man in your position from a man in mine, there is no show of subservience, compatible with the transaction of business between us, that I should think sufficient. I frankly tell you, sir, I give it up altogether. I feel that I could not satisfy my own mind; and Heaven knows, Mr. Dombey, you can afford to dispense with the endeavour." If he had carried these words about with him, printed on a placard, and had constantly offered it to Mr. Dombey's perusal on

the breast of his coat, he could not have been more explicit than he was.

This was Carker the manager. Mr. Carker the junior, Walter's friend, was his brother; two or three years older than he, but widely removed

in station. The younger brother's post was on the top of the official ladder; the elder brother's at the bottom. The elder brother never gained a stove, or raised his foot to mount one. Young men passed above his head, and rose and rose;



"YOU RESPECT NOBODY, CARKER, I THINK," SAID MR. DOMBEY.

"NO?" INQUIRED CARKER, WITH ANOTHER WIDE AND MOST FELINE SHOW OF HIS TEETH.

but he was always at the bottom. He was quite resigned to occupy that low condition: never complained of it: and certainly never hoped to escape from it.

"How do you do this morning?" said Mr. Carker the manager, entering Mr. Dombey's

room soon after his arrival one day: with a bundle of papers in his hand.

"How do you do, Carker?" said Mr. Dombey, rising from his chair, and standing with his back to the fire. "Have you anything there for me?"

"I don't know that I need trouble you," re-

turned Carker, turning over the papers in his hand. "You have a committee to-day at three, you know."

"And one at three, three-quarters," added Mr. Dombey.

"Catch you forgetting anything!" exclaimed Carker, still turning over his papers. "If Mr. Paul inherits your memory, he'll be a troublesome customer in the House. One of you is enough."

"You have an accurate memory of your own," said Mr. Dombey.

"Oh! /!" returned the manager. "It's the only capital of a man like *me*."

Mr. Dombey did not look less pompous, or at all displeased, as he stood leaning against the chimney-piece, surveying his (of course unconscious) clerk from head to foot. The stiffness and nicety of Mr. Carker's dress, and a certain arrogance of manner, either natural to him or imitated from a pattern not far off, gave great additional effect to his humility. He seemed a man who would contend against the power that vanquished him, if he could, but who was utterly borne down by the greatness and superiority of Mr. Dombey.

"Is Morfin here?" asked Mr. Dombey after a short pause, during which Mr. Carker had been fluttering his papers, and muttering little abstracts of their contents to himself.

"Morfin's here," he answered, looking up with his widest and most sudden smile; "humming musical recollections—of his last night's quartet party, I suppose—through the walls between us, and driving me half mad. I wish he'd make a bonfire of his violoncello, and burn his music-books in it."

"You respect nobody, Carker, I think," said Mr. Dombey.

"No?" inquired Carker, with another wide and most feline show of his teeth. "Well! Not many people, I believe. I wouldn't answer, perhaps," he murmured, as if he were only thinking it, "for more than one."

A dangerous quality, if real; and a not less dangerous one, if feigned. But Mr. Dombey hardly seemed to think so, as he still stood with his back to the fire, drawn up to his full height, and looking at his head clerk with a dignified composure, in which there seemed to lurk a stronger latent sense of power than usual.

"Talking of Morfin," resumed Mr. Carker, taking out one paper from the rest, "he reports a junior dead in the agency at Barbadoes, and proposes to reserve a passage in the *Son* and *Heir*—she'll sail in a month or so—for the successor. You don't care who goes, I suppose? We have nobody of that sort here."

Mr. Dombey shook his head with supreme indifference.

"It's no very precious appointment," observed Mr. Carker, taking up a pen with which to indorse a memorandum on the back of the paper. "I hope he may bestow it on some orphan nephew of a musical friend. It may perhaps stop *his* fiddle-playing, if he has a gift that way. Who's that? Come in!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carker. I didn't know you were here, sir," answered Walter, appearing with some letters in his hand, unopened, and newly arrived. "Mr. Carker the junior, sir——"

At the mention of this name, Mr. Carker the manager was, or affected to be, touched to the quick with shame and humiliation. He cast his eyes full on Mr. Dombey with an altered and apologetic look, abased them on the ground, and remained for a moment without speaking.

"I thought, sir," he said suddenly and angrily, turning on Walter, "that you had been before requested not to drag Mr. Carker the junior into your conversation."

"I beg your pardon," returned Walter. "I was only going to say that Mr. Carker the junior had told me he believed you were gone out, or I should not have knocked at the door when you were engaged with Mr. Dombey. These are letters for Mr. Dombey, sir."

"Very well, sir," returned Mr. Carker the manager, plucking them sharply from his hand. "Go about your business."

But, in taking them with so little ceremony, Mr. Carker dropped one on the floor, and did not see what he had done; neither did Mr. Dombey observe the letter lying near his feet. Walter hesitated for a moment, thinking that one or other of them would notice it; but finding that neither did, he stopped, came back, picked it up, and laid it himself on Mr. Dombey's desk. The letters were post letters; and it happened that the one in question was Mrs. Pipchin's regular report, directed as usual—for Mrs. Pipchin was but an indifferent penwoman—by Florence. Mr. Dombey, having his attention silently called to this letter by Walter, started and looked fiercely at him, as if he believed that he had purposely selected it from all the rest.

"You can leave the room, sir!" said Mr. Dombey haughtily.

He crushed the letter in his hand; and, having watched Walter out at the door, put it in his pocket without breaking the seal.

"You want somebody to send to the West Indies, you were saying," observed Mr. Dombey hurriedly.

"Yes," replied Carker.

"Send young Gay."

"Good, very good indeed. Nothing easier," said Mr. Carker without any show of surprise, and taking up the pen to re-indorse the letter as coolly as he had done before. "Send young Gay."

"Call him back," said Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Carker was quick to do so, and Walter was quick to return.

"Gay," said Mr. Dombey, turning a little to look at him over his shoulder, "here is a——"

"An opening," said Mr. Carker, with his mouth stretched to the utmost.

"In the West Indies. At Barbadoes. I am going to send you," said Mr. Dombey, scorning to embellish the bare truth, "to fill a junior situation in the counting-house at Barbadoes. Let your uncle know from me that I have chosen you to go to the West Indies."

Walter's breath was so completely taken away by his astonishment, that he could hardly find enough for the repetition of the words "West Indies."

"Somebody must go," said Mr. Dombey, "and you are young and healthy, and your uncle's circumstances are not good. Tell your uncle that you are appointed. You will not go yet. There will be an interval of a month—or two, perhaps."

"Shall I remain there, sir?" inquired Walter.

"Will you remain there, sir!" repeated Mr. Dombey, turning a little more round towards him. "What do you mean? What does he mean, Carker?"

"Live there, sir?" faltered Walter.

"Certainly," returned Mr. Dombey.

Walter bowed.

"That's all," said Mr. Dombey, resuming his letters. "You will explain to him in good time about the usual outfit, and so forth, Carker, of course. He needn't wait, Carker."

"You needn't wait, Gav," observed Mr. Carker; bare to the gums.

"Unless," said Mr. Dombey, stopping in his reading without looking off the letter, and seeming to listen—"unless he has anything to say."

"No, sir," returned Walter, agitated and confused, and almost stunned, as an infinite variety of pictures presented themselves to his mind; among which Captain Cuttle, in his glazed hat, transfixed with astonishment at Mrs. MacStinger's, and his uncle bemoaning his loss in the little back-parlour, held prominent places. "I hardly know—I—I am much obliged, sir."

"He needn't wait, Carker," said Mr. Dombey. And as Mr. Carker again echoed the words, and also collected his papers as if he were going

away too, Walter felt that his lingering any longer would be an unpardonable intrusion—especially as he had nothing to say—and therefore walked out quite confounded.

Going along the passage, with the mingled consciousness and helplessness of a dream, he heard Mr. Dombey's door shut again as Mr. Carker came out: and immediately afterwards that gentleman called to him.

"Bring your friend Mr. Carker the junior to my room, sir, if you please."

Walter went to the outer office, and apprised Mr. Carker the junior of his errand, who accordingly came out from behind a partition where he sat alone in one corner, and returned with him to the room of Mr. Carker the manager.

That gentleman was standing with his back to the fire, and his hands under his coat-tails, looking over his white cravat, as unpromisingly as Mr. Dombey himself could have looked. He received them without any change in his attitude or softening of his harsh and black expression: merely signing to Walter to close the door.

"John Carker," said the manager, when this was done, turning suddenly upon his brother, with his two rows of teeth bristling as if he would have bitten him, "what is the league between you and this young man, in virtue of which I am haunted and hunted by the mention of your name? Is it not enough for you, John Carker, that I am your near relation, and can't detach myself from that——"

"Say disgrace, James," interposed the other in a low voice, finding that he stammered for a word. "You meant it, and have reason. say disgrace."

"From that disgrace," assented his brother with keen emphasis, "but is the fact to be blurted out and trumpeted, and proclaimed continually in the presence of the very House? In moments of confidence, too? Do you think your name is calculated to harmonise in this place with trust and confidence, John Carker?"

"No," returned the other. "No, James. God knows I have no such thought."

"What is your thought, then?" said his brother, "and why do you thrust yourself in my way? Haven't you injured me enough already?"

"I have never injured you, James, wilfully."

"You are my brother," said the manager. "That's injury enough."

"I wish I could undo it, James."

"I wish you could and would."

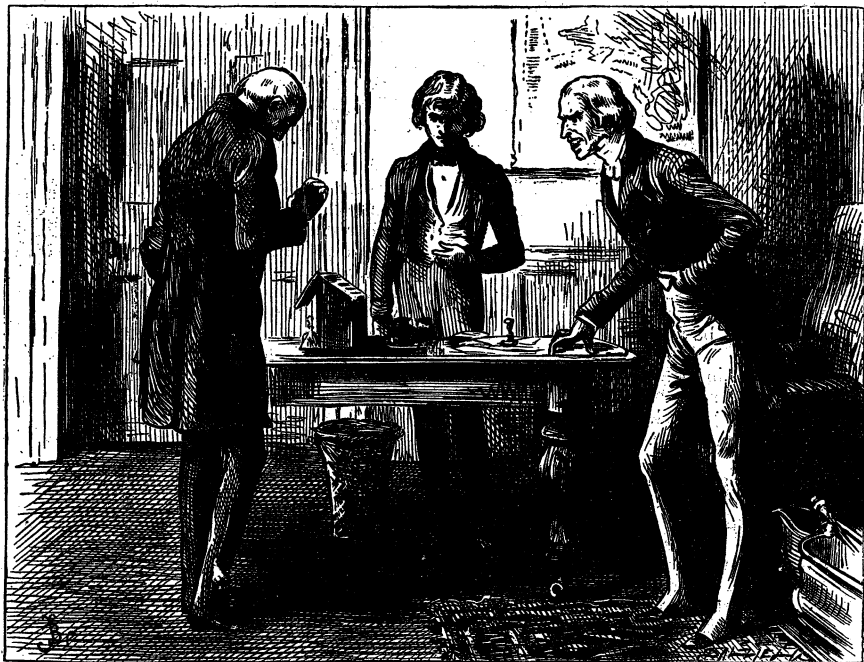
During this conversation, Walter had looked from one brother to the other with pain and amazement. He who was the senior in years, and junior in the House, stood, with his eyes

cast upon the ground, and his head bowed, humbly listening to the reproaches of the other. Though these were rendered very bitter by the tone and look with which they were accompanied, and by the presence of Walter, whom they so much surprised and shocked, he entered no other protest against them than by slightly raising his right hand in a deprecatory manner, as if he would have said, "Spare me!" So, had they been blows, and he a brave man, under

strong constraint, and weakened by bodily suffering, he might have stood before the executioner.

Generous and quick in all his emotions, and regarding himself as the innocent occasion of these taunts, Walter now struck in with all the earnestness he felt.

"Mr. Carker," he said, addressing himself to the manager, "indeed, indeed, this is my fault solely. In a kind of heedlessness for which I



"DURING THIS CONVERSATION, WALTER HAD LOOKED FROM ONE BROTHER TO THE OTHER WITH PAIN AND AMAZEMENT."

cannot blame myself enough, I have, I have no doubt, mentioned Mr. Carker the junior much oftener than was necessary; and have allowed his name sometimes to slip through my lips, when it was against your express wish. But it has been my own mistake, sir. We have never exchanged one word upon the subject—very few, indeed, on any subject. And it has not been," added Walter after a moment's pause, "all heedlessness on my part, sir; for I have

felt an interest in Mr. Carker ever since I have been here, and have hardly been able to help speaking of him sometimes, when I have thought of him so much!"

Walter said this from his soul, and with the very breath of honour. For he looked upon the bowed head, and the downcast eyes, and upraised hand, and thought, "I have felt it; and why should I not avow it in behalf of this unfriended, broken man?"

"In truth, you have avoided me, Mr. Carker," said Walter, with the tears rising to his eyes; so true was his compassion. "I know it, to my disappointment and regret. When I first came here, and ever since, I am sure I have tried to be as much your friend as one of my age could presume to be; but it has been of no use."

"And observe," said the manager, taking him up quickly, "it will be of still less use, Gay, if you persist in forcing Mr. John Carker's name on people's attention. That is not the way to befriend Mr. John Carker. Ask him if he thinks it is."

"It is no service to me," said the brother. "It only leads to such a conversation as the present, which I need not say I could have well spared. No one can be a better friend to me:" he spoke here very distinctly, as if he would impress it upon Walter: "than in forgetting me, and leaving me to go my way, unquestioned and unnoticed."

"Your memory not being retentive, Gay, of what you are told by others," said Mr. Carker the manager, warming himself with great and increased satisfaction, "I thought it well that you should be told this from the best authority," nodding towards his brother. "You are not likely to forget it now, I hope. That's all, Gay. You can go."

Walter passed out at the door, and was about to close it after him, when, hearing the voice of the brothers again, and also the mention of his own name, he stood irresolutely, with his hand upon the lock, and the door ajar, uncertain whether to return or go away. In this position he could not help overhearing what followed.

"Think of me more leniently, if you can, James," said John Carker, "when I tell you I have had—how could I help having, with my history written here?" striking himself upon the breast—"my whole heart awakened by my observation of that boy, Walter Gay. I saw in him, when he first came here, almost my other self."

"Your other self!" repeated the manager disdainfully.

"Not as I am, but as I was when I first came here too; as sanguine, giddy, youthful, inexperienced; flushed with the same restless and adventurous fancies; and full of the same qualities, fraught with the same capacity of leading on to good or evil."

"I hope not," said his brother, with some hidden and sarcastic meaning in his tone.

"You strike me sharply; and your hand is steady, and your thrust is very deep," returned the other, speaking (or so Walter thought) as if

some cruel weapon actually stabbed him as he spoke. "I imagined all this when he was a boy. I believed it. It was a truth to me. I saw him lightly walking on the edge of an unseen gulf where so many others walk with equal gaiety, and from which——"

"The old excuse," interrupted his brother as he stirred the fire. "So many. Go on. Say, so many fall."

"From which ONE traveller fell," returned the other, "who set forward on his way, a boy like him, and missed his footing more and more, and slipped a little and a little lower, and went on stumbling still, until he fell headlong, and found himself below, a shattered man. Think what I suffered when I watched that boy."

"You have only yourself to thank for it," returned the brother.

"Only myself," he assented with a sigh. "I don't seek to divide the blame or shame."

"You have divided the shame," James Carker muttered through his teeth. And through so many and such close teeth he could mutter well.

"Ah, James!" returned his brother, speaking for the first time in an accent of reproach, and seeming, by the sound of his voice, to have covered his face with his hands, "I have been, since then, a useful foil to you. You have trodden on me freely, in your climbing up. Don't spurn me with your heel!"

A silence ensued. After a time, Mr. Carker the manager was heard rustling among his papers, as if he had resolved to bring the interview to a conclusion. At the same time, his brother withdrew nearer to the door.

"That's all," he said. "I watched him with such trembling and such fear, as was some little punishment to me, until he passed the place where I first fell; and then, though I had been his father, I believe I never could have thanked God more devoutly. I didn't dare to warn him, and advise him: but, if I had seen direct cause, I would have shown him my example. I was afraid to be seen speaking with him, lest it should be thought I did him harm, and tempted him to evil, and corrupted him: or lest I really should. There may be such contagion in me; I don't know. Piece out my history, in connection with young Walter Gay; and what he has made me feel; and think of me more leniently, James, if you can."

With these words he came out to where Walter was standing. He turned a little paler when he saw him there, and paler yet when Walter caught him by the hand, and said in a whisper:

"Mr. Carker, pray let me thank you! Let me say how much I feel for you! How sorry I

am to have been the unhappy cause of all this! How I almost look upon you now as my protector and guardian! How very, very much I feel obliged to you and pity you!" said Walter, squeezing both his hands, and hardly knowing, in his agitation, what he did or said.

Mr. Morfin's room being close at hand and empty, and the door wide open, they moved thither by one accord: the passage being seldom free from some one passing to or fro. When they were there, and Walter saw in Mr. Carker's face some traces of the emotion within, he almost felt as if he had never seen the face before; it was so greatly changed.

"Walter," he said, laying his hand on his shoulder, "I am far removed from you, and may I ever be! Do you know what I am?"

"What you are?" appeared to hang on Walter's lips as he regarded him attentively.

"It was begun," said Carker, "before my twenty-first birthday—led up to long before, but not begun till near that time. I had robbed them when I came of age. I robbed them afterwards. Before my twenty-second birthday, it was all found out; and then, Walter, from all men's society, I died."

Again his last few words hung trembling upon Walter's lips, but he could neither utter them, nor any of his own.

"The House was very good to me. May Heaven reward the old man for his forbearance! This one, too, his son, who was then newly in the firm, where I had held great trust. I was called into that room which is now his—I have never entered it since—and came out what you know me. For many years I sat in my present seat, alone as now, but then a known and recognised example to the rest. They were all merciful to me, and I lived. Time has altered that part of my poor expiation; and I think, except the three heads of the House, there is no one here who knows my story rightly. Before the little boy grows up, and has it told to him, my corner may be vacant. I would rather that it might be so! This is the only change to me since that day, when I left all youth, and hope, and good men's company behind me in that room. God bless you, Walter! Keep you; and all dear to you, in honesty, or strike them dead!"

Some recollection of his trembling from head to foot, as if with excessive cold, and of his bursting into tears, was all that Walter could add to this, when he tried to recall exactly what had passed between them.

When Walter saw him next, he was bending over his desk, in his old silent, drooping, hum-

bled way. Then, observing him at his work, and feeling how resolved he evidently was that no further intercourse should arise between them, and thinking again and again on all he had seen and heard that morning in so short a time, in connection with the history of both the Carkers, Walter could hardly believe that he was under orders for the West Indies, and would soon be lost to Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle, and to glimpses few and far between of Florence Dombey—no, he meant Paul—and to all he loved, and liked, and looked for in his daily life.

But it was true; and the news had already penetrated to the outer office; for while he sat with a heavy heart, pondering on these things, and resting his head upon his arm, Perch, the messenger, descending from his mahogany bracket, and jogging his elbow, begged his pardon, but wished to say in his ear, Did he think he could arrange to send home to Mrs. Perch's own eating, in the course of her recovery from her next confinement?

CHAPTER XIV.

PAUL GROWS MORE AND MORE OLD-FASHIONED, AND GOES HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

WHEN the Midsummer vacation approached, no indecent manifestations of joy were exhibited by the leaden-eyed young gentlemen assembled at Doctor Blimber's. Any such violent expression as "breaking up" would have been quite inapplicable to that polite establishment. The young gentlemen oozed away, semi-annually, to their own homes; but they never broke up. They would have scorned the action.

Tozer, who was constantly galled and tormented by a starched white cambric neckerchief, which he wore at the express desire of Mrs. Tozer, his parent, who, designing him for the Church, was of opinion that he couldn't be in that forward state of preparation too soon—Tozer said, indeed, that choosing between two evils, he thought he would rather stay where he was than go home. However inconsistent this declaration might appear with that passage in Tozer's Essay on the subject, wherein he had observed "that the thoughts of home, and all its recollections, awakened in his mind the most pleasing emotions of anticipation and delight," and had also likened himself to a Roman

general, flushed with a recent victory over the Icení, or laden with Carthaginian spoil, advancing within a few hours' march of the Capitol, presupposed, for the purposes of the simile, to be the dwelling-place of Mrs. Tozer, still it was very sincerely made. For it seemed that Tozer had a dreadful uncle, who not only volunteered examinations of him, in the holidays, on abstruse points, but twisted innocent events and things, and wrenched them to the same fell purpose. So that if this uncle took him to the play, or, on a similar pretence of kindness, carried him to see a giant, or a dwarf, or a conjurer, or anything, Tozer knew he had read up some classical allusion to the subject beforehand, and was thrown into a state of mortal apprehension; not foreseeing where he might break out, or what authority he might not quote against him.

As to Briggs, his father made no show of artifice about it. He never would leave him alone. So numerous and severe were the mental trials of that unfortunate youth in vacation-time, that the friends of the family (then resident near Bayswater, London) seldom approached the ornamental piece of water in Kensington Gardens without a vague expectation of seeing Master Briggs's hat floating on the surface, and an unfinished exercise lying on the bank. Briggs, therefore, was not at all sanguine on the subject of holidays; and these two sharers of little Paul's bedroom were so fair a sample of the young gentlemen in general, that the most elastic among them contemplated the arrival of those festive periods with genteel resignation.

It was far otherwise with little Paul. The end of these first holidays was to witness his separation from Florence, but who ever looked forward to the end of holidays whose beginning was not yet come? Not Paul, assuredly. As the happy time drew near, the lions and tigers climbing up the bedroom walls became quite tame and frolicsome. The grim, sly faces in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth relaxed and peeped out at him with less wicked eyes. The grave old clock had more of personal interest in the tone of its formal inquiry; and the restless sea went rolling on all night, to the sound of a melancholy strain—yet it was pleasant too—that rose and fell with the waves, and rocked him, as it were, to sleep.

Mr. Feeder, B.A., seemed to think that he, too, would enjoy the holidays very much. Mr. Toots projected a life of holidays from that time forth; for, as he regularly informed Paul every day, it was his "last half" at Doctor Blimber's, and he was going to begin to come into his property directly.

It was perfectly understood between Paul and Mr. Toots that they were intimate friends, notwithstanding their distance in point of years and station. As the vacation approached, and Mr. Toots breathed harder and stared oftener in Paul's society than he had done before, Paul knew that he meant he was sorry they were going to lose sight of each other, and felt very much obliged to him for his patronage and good opinion.

It was even understood by Doctor Blimber, Mrs. Blimber, and Miss Blimber, as well as by the young gentlemen in general, that Toots had somehow constituted himself protector and guardian of Dombey, and the circumstance became so notorious, even to Mrs. Pipchin, that the good old creature cherished feelings of bitterness and jealousy against Toots; and, in the sanctuary of her own home, repeatedly denounced him as "a chuckle-headed noodle." Whereas the innocent Toots had no more idea of awakening Mrs. Pipchin's wrath than he had of any other definite possibility or proposition. On the contrary, he was disposed to consider her rather a remarkable character, with many points of interest about her. For this reason he smiled on her with so much urbanity, and asked her how she did so often, in the course of her visits to little Paul, that at last she one night told him plainly she wasn't used to it, whatever he might think; and she could not and she would not bear it, either from himself or any other puppy then existing: at which unexpected acknowledgment of his civilities, Mr. Toots was so alarmed that he secreted himself in a retired spot until she had gone. Nor did he ever again face the doughty Mrs. Pipchin under Doctor Blimber's roof.

They were within two or three weeks of the holidays, when, one day, Cornelia Blimber called Paul into her room, and said, "Dombey, I am going to send home your analysis."

"Thank you, ma'am," returned Paul.

"You know what I mean, do you, Dombey?" inquired Miss Blimber, looking hard at him through the spectacles.

"No, ma'am," said Paul.

"Dombey, Dombey," said Miss Blimber, "I begin to be afraid you are a sad boy. When you don't know the meaning of an expression, why don't you seek for information?"

"Mrs. Pipchin told me I wasn't to ask questions," returned Paul.

"I must beg you not to mention Mrs. Pipchin to me on any account, Dombey," returned Miss Blimber. "I couldn't think of allowing it. The course of study here is very far removed from

anything of that sort. A repetition of such allusions would make it necessary for me to request to hear without a mistake, before breakfast-time to-morrow morning, from *Verbum personale* down to *simillima cygno*."

"I didn't mean, ma'am——" began little Paul.

"I must trouble you not to tell me that you didn't mean, if you please, Dombey," said Miss Blimber, who preserved an awful politeness in her admonitions. "That is a line of argument I couldn't dream of permitting."

Paul felt it safest to say nothing at all, so he only looked at Miss Blimber's spectacles. Miss Blimber, having shaken her head at him gravely, referred to a paper lying before her.

"Analysis of the character of P. Dombey." If my recollection serves me," said Miss Blimber, breaking off, "the word analysis, as opposed to synthesis, is thus defined by Walker: 'The resolution of an object, whether of the senses or of the intellect, into its first elements.' As opposed to synthesis, you observe. Now you know what analysis is, Dombey."

Dombey didn't seem to be absolutely blinded by the light let in upon his intellect, but he made Miss Blimber a little bow.

"Analysis," resumed Miss Blimber, casting her eye over the paper, "'of the character of P. Dombey. I find that the natural capacity of Dombey is extremely good: and that his general disposition to study may be stated in an equal ratio. Thus, taking eight as our standard and highest number, I find these qualities in Dombey stated each at six three-fourths!'"

Miss Blimber paused to see how Paul received this news. Being undecided whether six three-fourths meant six pounds fifteen, or sixpence three farthings, or six foot three, or three-quarters past six, or six somethings that he hadn't learnt yet, with three unknown something elses over, Paul rubbed his hands and looked straight at Miss Blimber. It happened to answer as well as anything else he could have done; and Cornelia proceeded.

"Violence two. Selfishness two. Inclination to low company, as evinced in the case of a person named Glubb, originally seven, but since reduced. Gentlemanly demeanour four, and improving with advancing years.' Now, what I particularly wish to call your attention to, Dombey, is the general observation at the close of this analysis."

Paul set himself to follow it with great care.

"It may be generally observed of Dombey," said Miss Blimber, reading in a loud voice, and at every second word directing her

spectacles towards the little figure before her: "that his abilities and inclinations are good, and that he has made as much progress as under the circumstances could have been expected. But it is to be lamented of this young gentleman that he is singular (what is usually termed old-fashioned) in his character and conduct, and that, without presenting anything in either which distinctly calls for reprobation, he is often very unlike other young gentlemen of his age and social position.' Now, Dombey," said Miss Blimber, laying down the paper, "do you understand that?"

"I think I do, ma'am," said Paul.

"This analysis, you see, Dombey," Miss Blimber continued, "is going to be sent home to your respected parent. It will naturally be very painful to him to find that you are singular in your character and conduct. It is naturally painful to us; for we can't like you, you know, Dombey, as well as we could wish."

She touched the child upon a tender point. He had secretly become more and more solicitous from day to day, as the time of his departure drew more near, that all the house should like him. For some hidden reason, very imperfectly understood by himself—if understood at all—he felt a gradually increasing impulse of affection towards almost everything and everybody in the place. He could not bear to think that they would be quite indifferent to him when he was gone. He wanted them to remember him kindly; and he had made it his business even to conciliate a great, hoarse, shaggy dog, chained up at the back of the house, who had previously been the terror of his life: that even he might miss him when he was no longer there.

Little thinking that in this he only showed again the difference between himself and his compeers, poor tiny Paul set it forth to Miss Blimber as well as he could, and begged her, in despite of the official analysis, to have the goodness to try and like him. To Mrs. Blimber, who had joined them, he preferred the same petition: and when that lady could not forbear, even in his presence, from giving utterance to her often-repeated opinion, that he was an odd child, Paul told her that he was sure she was quite right; that he thought it must be his bones, but he didn't know; and that he hoped she would overlook it, for he was fond of them all.

"Not so fond," said Paul, with a mixture of timidity and perfect frankness, which was one of the most peculiar and most engaging qualities of the child, "not so fond as I am of Florence, of course; that could never be. You couldn't expect that, could you, ma'am?"

"Oh! the old-fashioned little soul!" cried Mrs. Blimber in a whisper.

"But I like everybody here very much," pursued Paul, "and I should grieve to go away, and think that any one was glad that I was gone, or didn't care."

Mrs. Blimber was now quite sure that Paul was the oddest child in the world; and when she told the Doctor what had passed, the Doctor did not controvert his wife's opinion. But he said, as he had said before, when Paul first came, that study would do much; and he also said, as he had said on that occasion, "Bring him on, Cornelia! Bring him on!"

Cornelia had always brought him on as vigorously as she could; and Paul had had a hard life of it. But, over and above the getting through his tasks, he had long had another purpose always present to him, and to which he still held fast. It was, to be a gentle, useful, quiet little fellow, always striving to secure the love and attachment of the rest; and though he was yet often to be seen at his old post on the stairs, or watching the waves and clouds from his solitary window, he was oftener found, too, among the other boys, modestly rendering them some little voluntary service. Thus it came to pass that, even among those rigid and absorbed young anchorites who mortified themselves beneath the roof of Doctor Blimber, Paul was an object of general interest; a fragile little plaything that they all liked, and that no one would have thought of treating roughly. But he could not change his nature, or rewrite the analysis; and so they all agreed that Dombey was old-fashioned.

There were some immunities, however, attaching to the character enjoyed by no one else. They could have better spared a newer-fashioned child, and that alone was much. When the others only bowed to Doctor Blimber and family on retiring for the night, Paul would stretch out his morsel of a hand, and boldly shake the Doctor's; also Mrs. Blimber's, also Cornelia's. If anybody was to be begged off from impending punishment, Paul was always the delegate. The weak-eyed young man himself had once consulted him, in reference to a little breakage of glass and china. And it was darkly rumoured that the butler, regarding him with favour such as that stern man had never shown before to mortal boy, had sometimes mingled porter with his table beer to make him strong.

Over and above these extensive privileges, Paul had free right of entry to Mr. Feeder's room, from which apartment he had twice led Mr. Toots into the open air in a state of faint-

ness, consequent on an unsuccessful attempt to smoke a very blunt cigar: one of a bundle which that young gentleman had covertly purchased on the shingle from a most desperate smuggler, who had acknowledged, in confidence, that two hundred pounds was the price set upon his head, dead or alive, by the Custom House. It was a snug room, Mr. Feeder's, with his bed in another little room inside of it; and a flute, which Mr. Feeder couldn't play yet, but was going to make a point of learning, he said, hanging up over the fire-place. There were some books in it, too, and a fishing-rod; for Mr. Feeder said he should certainly make a point of learning to fish when he could find time. Mr. Feeder had amassed, with similar intentions, a beautiful little curly second-hand key-bugle, a chess-board and men, a Spanish Grammar, a set of sketching materials, and a pair of boxing gloves. The art of self-defence Mr. Feeder said he should undoubtedly make a point of learning, as he considered it the duty of every man to do; for it might lead to the protection of a female in distress.

But Mr. Feeder's great possession was a large green jar of snuff, which Mr. Toots had brought down as a present, at the close of the last vacation; and for which he had paid a high price, as having been the genuine property of the Prince Regent. Neither Mr. Toots nor Mr. Feeder could partake of this or any other snuff, even in the most stinted and moderate degree, without being seized with convulsions of sneezing. Nevertheless, it was their great delight to moisten a boxful with cold tea, stir it up on a piece of parchment with a paper knife, and devote themselves to its consumption then and there. In the course of which cramming of their noses, they endured surprising torments with the constancy of martyrs: and, drinking table beer at intervals, felt all the glories of dissipation.

To little Paul, sitting silent in their company, and by the side of his chief patron, Mr. Toots, there was a dread charm in these reckless occasions; and when Mr. Feeder spoke of the dark mysteries of London, and told Mr. Toots that he was going to observe it himself closely in all its ramifications in the approaching holidays, and for that purpose had made arrangements to board with two old maiden ladies at Peckham, Paul regarded him as if he were the hero of some book of travels or wild adventure, and was almost afraid of such a slashing person.

Going into this room one evening when the holidays were very near, Paul found Mr. Feeder filling up the blanks in some printed letters.

while some others, already filled up and strewn before him, were being folded and sealed by Mr. Toots. Mr. Feeder said, "Aha, Dombey, there you are, are you?"—for they were always kind to him, and glad to see him—and then said, tossing one of the letters towards him, "And *there* you are, too, Dombey. That's yours."

"Mine, sir?" said Paul.

"Your invitation," returned Mr. Feeder.

Paul, looking at it, found, in copper-plate print, with the exception of his own name and the date, which were in Mr. Feeder's penmanship, that Doctor and Mrs. Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr. P. Dombey's company at an early party on Wednesday evening the seventeenth instant; and that the hour was half-past seven o'clock; and that the object was quadrilles. Mr. Toots also showed him, by holding up a companion sheet of paper, that Doctor and Mrs. Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr. Toots's company at an early party on Wednesday evening the seventeenth instant, when the hour was half-past seven o'clock, and when the object was quadrilles. He also found, on glancing at the table where Mr. Feeder sat, that the pleasure of Mr. Briggs's company, and of Mr. Tozer's company, and of every young gentleman's company, was requested by Doctor and Mrs. Blimber on the same genteel occasion.

Mr. Feeder then told him, to his great joy, that his sister was invited, and that it was a half-yearly event, and that, as the holidays began that day, he could go away with his sister after the party, if he liked, which Paul interrupted him to say he *would* like very much. Mr. Feeder then gave him to understand that he would be expected to inform Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, in superfine small-hand, that Mr. P. Dombey would be happy to have the honour of waiting on them, in accordance with their polite invitation. Lastly, Mr. Feeder said he had better not refer to the festive occasion in the hearing of Doctor and Mrs. Blimber; as these preliminaries, and the whole of the arrangements, were conducted on principles of classicality and high breeding; and that Doctor and Mrs. Blimber on the one hand, and the young gentlemen on the other, were supposed, in their scholastic capacities, not to have the least idea of what was in the wind.

Paul thanked Mr. Feeder for these hints, and pocketing his invitation, sat down on a stool by the side of Mr. Toots, as usual. But Paul's head, which had long been ailing more or less, and was sometimes very heavy and painful, felt so uneasy that night that he was obliged to support it on his hand. And yet it drooped so,

that by little and little it sunk on Mr. Toots's knee; and rested there, as if it had no care to be ever lifted up again.

That was no reason why he should be deaf; but he must have been, he thought, for, by-and-by, he heard Mr. Feeder calling in his ear, and gently shaking him to rouse his attention. And when he raised his head, quite scared, and looked about him, he found that Doctor Blimber had come into the room; and that the window was open, and that his forehead was wet with sprinkled water; though how all this had been done without his knowledge was very curious indeed.

"Ah! Come, come! That's well! How is my little friend now?" said Doctor Blimber encouragingly.

"Oh! quite well, thank you, sir," said Paul.

But there seemed to be something the matter with the floor, for he couldn't stand upon it steadily; and with the walls too, for they were inclined to turn round and round, and could only be stopped by being looked at very hard indeed. Mr. Toots's head had the appearance of being at once bigger and farther off than was quite natural; and when he took Paul in his arms, to carry him up-stairs, Paul observed, with astonishment, that the door was in quite a different place from that in which he had expected to find it, and almost thought, at first, that Mr. Toots was going to walk straight up the chimney.

It was very kind of Mr. Toots to carry him to the top of the house so tenderly; and Paul told him that it was. But Mr. Toots said he would do a great deal more than that if he could; and, indeed, he did more as it was: for he helped Paul to undress, and helped him to bed, in the kindest manner possible, and then sat down by the bedside and chuckled very much; while Mr. Feeder, B.A., leaning over the bottom of the bedstead, set all the little bristles on his head bolt upright with his bony hands, and then made believe to spar at Paul with great science, on account of his being all right again, which was so uncommonly facetious, and kind too in Mr. Feeder, that Paul, not being able to make up his mind whether it was best to laugh or cry at him, did both at once.

How Mr. Toots melted away, and Mr. Feeder changed into Mrs. Pipchin, Paul never thought of asking; neither was he at all curious to know; but when he saw Mrs. Pipchin standing at the bottom of the bed instead of Mr. Feeder, he cried out, "Mrs. Pipchin, don't tell Florence!"

"Don't tell Florence what, my little Paul?" said Mrs. Pipchin, coming round to the bedside, and sitting down in the chair.

"About me," said Paul.

"No, no," said Mrs. Pipchin.

"What do you think I mean to do when I grow up, Mrs. Pipchin?" inquired Paul, turning his face towards her on his pillow, and resting his chin wistfully on his folded hands.

Mrs. Pipchin couldn't guess.

"I mean," said Paul, "to put my money all together in one bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life."

"Indeed!" cried Mrs. Pipchin.

"Yes," said Paul. "That's what I mean to do, when I——" He stopped and pondered for a moment.

Mrs. Pipchin's grey eye scanned his thoughtful face.

"If I grow up," said Paul. Then he went on immediately to tell Mrs. Pipchin all about the party, about Florence's invitation, about the pride he would have in the admiration that would be felt for her by all the boys, about their being so kind to him and fond of him, about his being so fond of them, and about his being so glad of it. Then he told Mrs. Pipchin about the analysis, and about his being certainly old-fashioned, and took Mrs. Pipchin's opinion on that point, and whether she knew why it was, and what it meant. Mrs. Pipchin denied the fact altogether, as the shortest way of getting out of the difficulty; but Paul was far from satisfied with that reply, and looked so searchingly at Mrs. Pipchin for a truer answer, that she was obliged to get up and look out of the window to avoid his eyes.

There was a certain calm apothecary, who attended at the establishment when any of the young gentlemen were ill, and somehow *he* got into the room, and appeared at the bedside with Mrs. Blimber. How they came there, or how long they had been there, Paul didn't know; but, when he saw them, he sat up in bed, and answered all the apothecary's questions at full length, and whispered to him that Florence was not to know anything about it if he pleased, and that he had set his mind upon her coming to the party. He was very chatty with the apothecary, and they parted excellent friends. Lying down again with his eyes shut, he heard the apothecary say, out of the room, and quite a long way off—or he dreamed it—that there was a want of vital power (what was that? Paul wondered), and great constitutional weakness.

That, as the little fellow had set his heart on parting with his schoolmates on the seventeenth, it would be better to indulge the fancy if he grew no worse. That he was glad to hear, from Mrs. Pipchin, that the little fellow would go to his friends in London on the eighteenth. That he would write to Mr. Dombey when he should have gained a better knowledge of the case, and before that day. That there was no immediate cause for—what? Paul lost that word. And that the little fellow had a fine mind, but was an old-fashioned boy.

What old fashion could that be, Paul wondered with a palpitating heart, that was so visibly expressed in him; so plainly seen by so many people?

He could neither make it out, nor trouble himself long with the effort. Mrs. Pipchin was again beside him, if she had ever been away (he thought she had gone out with the doctor, but it was all a dream, perhaps), and presently a bottle and glass got into her hands magically, and she poured out the contents for him. After that, he had some real good jelly, which Mrs. Blimber brought to him herself; and then he was so well, that Mrs. Pipchin went home, at his urgent solicitation, and Briggs and Tozer came to bed. Poor Briggs grumbled terribly about his own analysis, which could hardly have discomposed him more if it had been a chemical process; but he was very good to Paul, and so was Tozer, and so were all the rest, for they every one looked in before going to bed, and said, "How are you now, Dombey?" "Cheer up, little Dombey!" and so forth. After Briggs had got into bed, he lay awake for a long time, still bemoaning his analysis, and saying he knew it was all wrong, and they couldn't have analysed a murderer worse, and how would Doctor Blimber like it if his pocket money depended on it? It was very easy, Briggs said, to make a galley-slave of a boy all the half-year, and then score him up idle; and to crib two dinners a week out of his board, and then score him up greedy; but that wasn't going to be submitted to, he believed, was it? Oh! Ah!

Before the weak-eyed young man performed on the gong next morning, he came up-stairs to Paul, and told him he was to lie still, which Paul very gladly did. Mrs. Pipchin reappeared a little before the apothecary, and, a little after, the good young woman whom Paul had seen cleaning the stove on that first morning (how long ago it seemed now!) had brought him his breakfast. There was another consultation a long way off, or else Paul dreamed it again;

and then the apothecary, coming back with Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, said :

"Yes, I think, Doctor Blimber, we may release this young gentleman from his books just now; the vacation being so very near at hand."

"By all means," said Doctor Blimber. "My love, you will inform Cornelia, if you please."

"Assuredly," said Mrs. Blimber.

The apothecary, bending down, looked closely into Paul's eyes, and felt his head, and his pulse, and his heart, with so much interest and care, that Paul said, "Thank you, sir."

"Our little friend," observed Doctor Blimber, "has never complained."

"Oh no!" replied the apothecary. "He was not likely to complain."

"You find him greatly better?" said Doctor Blimber.

"Oh! He is greatly better, sir," returned the apothecary.

Paul had begun to speculate, in his own odd way, on the subject that might occupy the apothecary's mind just at that moment; so musingly had he answered the two questions of Doctor Blimber. But the apothecary happening to meet his little patient's eyes, as the latter set off on that mental expedition, and coming instantly out of his abstraction with a cheerful smile, Paul smiled in return, and abandoned it.

He lay in bed all that day, dozing and dreaming, and looking at Mr. Toots; but got up on the next, and went down-stairs. Lo and behold, there was something the matter with the great clock; and a workman on a pair of steps had taken its face off, and was poking instruments into the works by the light of a candle! This was a great event for Paul, who sat down on the bottom stair, and watched the operation attentively; now and then glancing at the clock face, leaning all askew against the wall hard by, and feeling a little confused by a suspicion that it was ogling him.

The workman on the steps was very civil; and as he said, when he observed Paul, "How do you do, sir?" Paul got into conversation with him, and told him he hadn't been quite well lately. The ice being thus broken, Paul asked him a multitude of questions about chimes and clocks: as, whether people watched up in the lonely church steeples by night to make them strike; and how the bells were rung when people died, and whether those were different bells from wedding bells, or only sounded dismal in the fancies of the living. Finding that his new acquaintance was not very well informed on the subject of the curfew bell of ancient days, Paul

gave him an account of that institution; and also asked him, as a practical man, what he thought about King Alfred's idea of measuring time by the burning of candles; to which the workman replied, that he thought it would be the ruin of the clock trade if it was to come up again. In fine, Paul looked on until the clock had quite recovered its familiar aspect, and resumed its sedate inquiry; when the workman, putting away his tools in a long basket, bade him good day, and went away. Though not before he had whispered something on the doormat to the footman, in which there was the phrase "old-fashioned"—for Paul heard it.

What could that old fashion be, that seemed to make the people sorry? What could it be?

Having nothing to learn now, he thought of this frequently; though not so often as he might have done, if he had had fewer things to think of. But he had a great many; and was always thinking, all day long.

First, there was Florence coming to the party. Florence would see that the boys were fond of him; and that would make her happy. This was his great theme. Let Florence once be sure that they were gentle and good to him, and that he had become a little favourite among them, and then she would always think of the time he had passed there, without being very sorry. Florence might be all the happier, too, for that, perhaps, when he came back.

When he came back! Fifty times a day his noiseless little feet went up the stairs to his own room, as he collected every book, and scrap, and trifle that belonged to him, and put them all together there, down to the minutest things, for taking home! There was no shade of coming back on little Paul; no preparation for it, or other reference to it, grew out of anything he thought or did, except this slight one in connection with his sister. On the contrary, he had to think of everything familiar to him, in his contemplative moods and in his wanderings about the house, as being to be parted with; and hence the many things he had to think of, all day long.

He had to peep into those rooms up-stairs, and think how solitary they would be when he was gone, and wonder through how many silent days, weeks, months, and years they would continue just as grave and undisturbed. He had to think—would any other child (old-fashioned, like himself) stray there at any time, to whom the same grotesque distortions of pattern and furniture would manifest themselves; and would anybody tell that boy of little Dombey, who had been there once?

He had to think of a portrait on the stairs, which always looked earnestly after him as he went away, eyeing it over his shoulder; and which, when he passed it in the company of any one, still seemed to gaze at him, and not at his companion. He had much to think of, in association with a print that hung up in another place, where, in the centre of a wondering group, one figure that he knew, a figure with a light about its head—benignant, mild, and merciful—stood pointing upward.

At his own bedroom window there were crowds of thoughts that mixed with these, and came on, one upon another, one upon another, like the rolling waves. Where those wild birds lived, that were always hovering out at sea in troubled weather; where the clouds rose, and first began; whence the wind issued on its rushing flight, and where it stopped; whether the spot where he and Florence had so often sat, and watched, and talked about these things, could ever be exactly as it used to be without them; whether it could ever be the same to Florence, if he were in some distant place, and she were sitting there alone.

He had to think, too, of Mr. Toots, and Mr. Feeder, B.A.; of all the boys; and of Doctor Blimber, Mrs. Blimber, and Miss Blimber; of home, and of his aunt and Miss Tox; of his father, Dombey and Son, Walter with the poor old uncle who had got the money he wanted, and the gruff-voiced captain with the iron hand. Besides all this, he had a number of little visits to pay in the course of the day; to the school-room, to Doctor Blimber's study, to Mrs. Blimber's private apartment, to Miss Blimber's, and to the dog. For he was free of the whole house now, to range it as he chose; and in his desire to part with everybody on affectionate terms, he attended, in his way, to them all. Sometimes he found places in books for Briggs, who was always losing them; sometimes he looked up words in dictionaries for other young gentlemen who were in extremity; sometimes he held skeins of silk for Mrs. Blimber to wind; sometimes he put Cornelia's desk to rights; sometimes he would even creep into the Doctor's study, and, sitting on the carpet near his learned feet, turn the globes softly, and go round the world, or take a flight among the far-off stars.

In those days immediately before the holidays, in short, when the other young gentlemen were labouring for dear life through a general resumption of the studies of the whole half-year, Paul was such a privileged pupil as had never been seen in that house before. He could hardly believe it himself; but his liberty lasted

from hour to hour, and from day to day; and little Dombey was caressed by every one. Doctor Blimber was so particular about him, that he requested Johnson to retire from the dinner-table one day, for having thoughtlessly spoken to him as "poor little Dombey;" which Paul thought rather hard and severe, though he had flushed at the moment, and wondered why Johnson should pity him. It was the more questionable justice, Paul thought, in the Doctor, from his having certainly overheard that great authority give his assent, on the previous evening, to the proposition (stated by Mrs. Blimber) that poor dear little Dombey was more old-fashioned than ever. And now it was that Paul began to think it must surely be old-fashioned to be very thin, and light, and easily tired, and soon disposed to lie down anywhere and rest; for he couldn't help feeling that these were more and more his habits every day.

At last the party-day arrived; and Doctor Blimber said at breakfast, "Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month." Mr. Toots immediately threw off his allegiance, and put on his ring; and mentioning the Doctor in casual conversation shortly afterwards, spoke of him as "Blimber!" This act of freedom inspired the older pupils with admiration and envy; but the younger spirits were appalled, and seemed to marvel that no beam fell down and crushed him.

Not the least allusion was made to the ceremonies of the evening, either at breakfast or at dinner; but there was a bustle in the house all day, and, in the course of his perambulations, Paul made acquaintance with various strange benches and candlesticks, and met a harp in a green great-coat standing on the landing outside the drawing-room door. There was something queer, too, about Mrs. Blimber's head at dinner-time, as if she had screwed her hair up too tight; and though Miss Blimber showed a graceful bunch of plaited hair on each temple, she seemed to have her own little curls in paper underneath, and in a playbill, too; for Paul read "Theatre Royal" over one of her sparkling spectacles, and "Brighton" over the other.

There was a grand array of white waistcoats and cravats in the young gentlemen's bedrooms as evening approached; and such a smell of singed hair, that Doctor Blimber sent up the footman with his compliments, and wished to know if the house was on fire. But it was only the hairdresser curling the young gentlemen, and overheating his tongs in the ardour of business.

When Paul was dressed—which was very soon

done, for he felt unwell and drowsy, and was not able to stand about it very long—he went down into the drawing-room; where he found Doctor Blimber pacing up and down the room full dressed, but with a dignified and unconcerned demeanour, as if he thought it barely possible that one or two people might drop in by-and-by. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Blimber appeared, looking lovely, Paul thought; and attired in such a number of skirts that it was quite an excursion to walk round her. Miss Blimber came down soon after her mamma; a little squeezed in appearance, but very charming.

Mr. Toots and Mr. Feeder were the next arrivals. Each of these gentlemen brought his hat in his hand, as if he lived somewhere else; and when they were announced by the butler, Doctor Blimber said, "Ay, ay, ay! God bless my soul!" and seemed extremely glad to see them. Mr. Toots was one blaze of jewellery and buttons; and he felt the circumstance so strongly, that when he had shaken hands with the Doctor, and had bowed to Mrs. Blimber and Miss Blimber, he took Paul aside, and said, "What do you think of this, Dombey?"

But, notwithstanding this modest confidence in himself, Mr. Toots appeared to be involved in a good deal of uncertainty whether, on the whole, it was judicious to button the bottom button of his waistcoat, and whether, on a calm revision of all the circumstances, it was best to wear his wristbands turned up or turned down. Observing that Mr. Feeder's were turned up, Mr. Toots turned his up; but the wristbands of the next arrival being turned down, Mr. Toots turned his down. The differences in point of waistcoat-buttoning, not only at the bottom, but at the top too, became so numerous and complicated as the arrivals thickened, that Mr. Toots was continually fingering that article of dress, as if he were performing on some instrument; and appeared to find the incessant execution it demanded quite bewildering.

All the young gentlemen, tightly cravatted, curled, and pumped, and with their best hats in their hands, having been at different times announced and introduced, Mr. Baps, the dancing-master, came, accompanied by Mrs. Baps, to whom Mrs. Blimber was extremely kind and condescending. Mr. Baps was a very grave gentleman, with a slow and measured manner of speaking; and, before he had stood under the lamp five minutes, he began to talk to Toots (who had been silently comparing pumps with him) about what you were to do with your raw materials when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold. Mr. Toots, to

whom the question seemed perplexing, suggested "Cook 'em." But Mr. Baps did not appear to think that would do.

Paul now slipped away from the cushioned corner of a sofa, which had been his post of observation, and went down-stairs into the tea-room to be ready for Florence, whom he had not seen for nearly a fortnight, as he had remained at Doctor Blimber's on the previous Saturday and Sunday, lest he should take cold. Presently she came: looking so beautiful in her simple ball dress, with her fresh flowers in her hand, that when she knelt down on the ground to take Paul round the neck and kiss him (for there was no one there but his friend and another young woman waiting to serve out the tea), he could hardly make up his mind to let her go again, or take away her bright and loving eyes from his face.

"But what is the matter, Floy?" asked Paul, almost sure that he saw a tear there.

"Nothing, darling, nothing," returned Florence.

Paul touched her cheek gently with his finger—and it *was* a tear. "Why, Floy!" said he.

"We'll go home together, and I'll nurse you, love," said Florence.

"Nurse me!" echoed Paul.

Paul couldn't understand what that had to do with it, nor why the two young women looked on so seriously, nor why Florence turned away her face for a moment, and then turned it back, lighted up again with smiles.

"Floy," said Paul, holding a ringlet of her dark hair in his hand, "tell me, dear. Do *you* think I have grown old-fashioned?"

His sister laughed, and fondled him, and told him "No."

"Because I know they say so," returned Paul, "and I want to know what they mean, Floy."

But a loud double knock coming at the door, and Florence hurrying to the table, there was no more said between them. Paul wondered again when he saw his friend whisper to Florence, as if she were comforting her; but a new arrival put that out of his head speedily.

It was Sir Barnet Skettles, Lady Skettles, and Master Skettles. Master Skettles was to be a new boy after the vacation, and Fame had been busy, in Mr. Feeder's room, with his father, who was in the House of Commons, and of whom Mr. Feeder had said that when he *did* catch the Speaker's eye (which he had been expected to do for three or four years), it was anticipated that he would rather touch up the Radicals.

"And what room is this, now, for instance?" said Lady Skettles to Paul's friend, 'Melia.

"Doctor Blimber's study, ma'am," was the reply.

Lady Skettles took a panoramic survey of it through her glass, and said to Sir Barnet Skettles, with a nod of approval, "Very good." Sir Barnet assented, but Master Skettles looked suspicious and doubtful.

"And this little creature, now," said Lady Skettles, turning to Paul. "Is he one of the——"

"Young gentlemen, ma'am; yes, ma'am," said Paul's friend.

"And what is your name, my pale child?" said Lady Skettles.

"Dombey," answered Paul.

Sir Barnet Skettles immediately interposed, and said that he had had the honour of meeting Paul's father at a public dinner, and that he hoped he was very well. Then Paul heard him say to Lady Skettles, "City—very rich—most respectable—Doctor mentioned it." And then he said to Paul, "Will you tell your good papa that Sir Barnet Skettles rejoiced to hear that he was very well, and sent him his best compliments?"

"Yes, sir," answered Paul.

"That is my brave boy," said Sir Barnet Skettles. "Barnet," to Master Skettles, who was revenging himself for the studies to come on the plum-cake, "this is a young gentleman you ought to know. This is a young gentleman you *may* know, Barnet," said Sir Barnet Skettles, with an emphasis on the permission.

"What eyes! What hair! What a lovely face!" exclaimed Lady Skettles softly, as she looked at Florence through her glass.

"My sister," said Paul, presenting her.

The satisfaction of the Skettleses was now complete. And as Lady Skettles had conceived, at first sight, a liking for Paul, they all went upstairs together; Sir Barnet Skettles taking care of Florence, and young Barnet following.

Young Barnet did not remain long in the background after they had reached the drawing-room, for Doctor Blimber had him out in no time, dancing with Florence. He did not appear to Paul to be particularly happy, or particularly anything but sulky, or to care much what he was about; but as Paul heard Lady Skettles say to Mrs. Blimber, while she beat time with her fan, that her dear boy was evidently smitten to death by that angel of a child, Miss Dombey, it would seem that Skettles junior was in a state of bliss without showing it.

Little Paul thought it a singular coincidence

that nobody had occupied his place among the pillows; and that, when he came into the room again, they should all make way for him to go back to it, remembering it was his. Nobody stood before him, either, when they observed that he liked to see Florence dancing, but they left the space in front quite clear, so that he might follow her with his eyes. They were so kind, too, even the strangers, of whom there were soon a great many, that they came and spoke to him every now and then, and asked him how he was, and if his head ached, and whether he was tired. He was very much obliged to them for all their kindness and attention, and reclining propped up in his corner, with Mrs. Blimber and Lady Skettles on the same sofa, and Florence coming and sitting by his side as soon as every dance was ended, he looked on very happily indeed.

Florence would have sat by him all night, and would not have danced at all of her own accord, but Paul made her by telling her how much it pleased him. And he told her the truth, too; for his small heart swelled, and his face glowed, when he saw how much they all admired her, and how she was the beautiful little rosebud of the room.

From his nest among the pillows, Paul could see and hear almost everything that passed, as if the whole were being done for his amusement. Among other little incidents that he observed, he observed Mr. Baps the dancing-master get into conversation with Sir Barnet Skettles, and very soon ask him, as he had asked Mr. Toots, what you were to do with your raw materials when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold—which was such a mystery to Paul that he was quite desirous to know what ought to be done with them. Sir Barnet Skettles had much to say upon the question, and said it; but it did not appear to solve the question, for Mr. Baps retorted, Yes, but supposing Russia stepped in with her tallows; which struck Sir Barnet almost dumb, for he could only shake his head after that, and say, Why, then you must fall back upon your cottons, he supposed.

Sir Barnet Skettles looked after Mr. Baps when he went to cheer up Mrs. Baps (who, being quite deserted, was pretending to look over the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp); as if he thought him a remarkable kind of man; and shortly afterwards he said so in those words to Doctor Blimber, and inquired if he might take the liberty of asking who he was, and whether he had ever been in the Board of Trade. Doctor Blimber answered, No, he believed not; and that in fact he was a professor of——

"Of something connected with statistics, I'll swear?" observed Sir Barnet Skettles.

"Why, no, Sir Barnet," replied Doctor Blimber, rubbing his chin. "No, not exactly."

"Figures of some sort, I would venture a bet," said Sir Barnet Skettles.

"Why, yes," said Doctor Blimber, "yes, but not of that sort. Mr. Baps is a very worthy sort of man, Sir Barnet, and—in fact, he's our professor of dancing."

Paul was amazed to see that this piece of

information quite altered Sir Barnet Skettles' opinion of Mr. Baps, and that Sir Barnet flew into a perfect rage, and glowered at Mr. Baps over on the other side of the room. He even went so far as to D Mr. Baps to Lady Skettles, in telling her what had happened, and to say that it was like his most con-sum-mate and confound-ded impudence.

There was another thing that Paul observed. Mr. Feeder, after imbibing several custard-cups of negus, began to enjoy himself. The dancing



THE BREAKING-UP PARTY AT DOCTOR BLIMBER'S.

in general was ceremonious, and the music rather solemn—a little like church music, in fact: but after the custard-cups, Mr. Feeder told Mr. Toots that he was going to throw a little spirit into the thing. After that Mr. Feeder not only began to dance as if he meant dancing, and nothing else, but secretly to stimulate the music to perform wild tunes. Further, he became particular in his attentions to the ladies; and dancing with Miss Blimber, whispered to her—

whispered to her!—though not so softly but that Paul heard him say this remarkable poetry,

"Had I a heart for falsehood framed,
I ne'er could injure You!"

This Paul heard him repeat to four young ladies in succession. Well might Mr. Feeder say to Mr. Toots, that he was afraid he should be the worse for it to-morrow!

Mrs. Blimber was a little alarmed by this—

comparatively speaking—profligate behaviour; and especially by the alteration in the character of the music, which, beginning to comprehend low melodies that were popular in the streets, might not unnaturally be supposed to give offence to Lady Skettles. But Lady Skettles was so very kind as to beg Mrs. Blimber not to mention it; and to receive her explanation, that Mr. Feeder's spirits sometimes betrayed him into excesses on these occasions, with the greatest courtesy and politeness; observing, that he seemed a very nice sort of person for his situation, and that she particularly liked the unassuming style of his hair—which (as already hinted) was about a quarter of an inch long.

Once, when there was a pause in the dancing, Lady Skettles told Paul that he seemed very fond of music. Paul replied that he was; and if she was too, she ought to hear his sister Florence sing. Lady Skettles presently discovered that she was dying with anxiety to have that gratification; and though Florence was at first very much frightened at being asked to sing before so many people, and begged earnestly to be excused, yet on Paul calling her to him, and saying, "Do, Floy! Please! For me, my dear!" she went straight to the piano, and began. "When they all drew a little away, that Paul might see her; and when he saw her sitting there alone, so young, and good, and beautiful, and kind to him; and heard her thrilling voice, so natural and sweet; and such a golden link between him and all his life's love and happiness, rising out of the silence; he turned his face away, and hid his tears. Not, as he told them when they spoke to him, not that the music was too plaintive or too sorrowful, but it was so dear to him.

They all loved Florence! How could they help it? Paul had known beforehand that they must and would; and sitting in his cushioned corner, with calmly-folded hands, and one leg loosely doubled under him, few would have thought what triumph and delight expanded his childish bosom while he watched her, or what a sweet tranquillity he felt. Lavish encomiums on "Dombey's sister", reached his ears from all the boys: admiration of the self-possessed and modest little beauty was on every lip: reports of her intelligence and accomplishments floated past him constantly: and, as if borne in upon the air of the summer night, there was a half-intelligible sentiment diffused around, referring to Florence and himself, and breathing sympathy for both, that soothed and touched him.

He did not know why. For all that the child observed, and felt, and thought that night—the

present and the absent; what was then, and what had been—were blended like the colours in the rainbow, or in the plumage of rich birds when the sun is shining on them, or in the softening sky when the same sun is setting. The many things he had had to think of lately, passed before him in the music; not as claiming his attention over again, or as likely ever more to occupy it, but as peacefully disposed of and gone. A solitary window, gazed through years ago, looked out upon an ocean, miles and miles away; upon its waters, fancies, busy with him only yesterday, were hushed and lulled to rest like broken waves. The same mysterious murmur he had wondered at, when lying on his couch upon the beach, he thought he still heard sounding through his sister's song, and through the hum of voices, and the tread of feet, and having some part in the faces flitting by, and even in the heavy gentleness of Mr. Toots, who frequently came up to shake him by the hand. Through the universal kindness he still thought he heard it, speaking to him; and even his old-fashioned reputation seemed to be allied to it, he knew not how. Thus little Paul sat musing, listening, looking on, and dreaming; and was very happy.

Until the time arrived for taking leave: and then, indeed, there was a sensation in the party. Sir Barnet Skettles brought up Skettles junior to shake hands with him, and asked him if he would remember to tell his good papa, with his best compliments, that he, Sir Barnet Skettles, had said he hoped the two young gentlemen would become intimately acquainted. Lady Skettles kissed him, and parted his hair upon his brow, and held him in her arms; and even Mrs. Baps—poor Mrs. Baps! Paul was glad of that—came over from beside the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp, and took leave of him quite as heartily as anybody in the room.

"Good-bye, Doctor Blimber," said Paul, stretching out his hand.

"Good-bye, my little friend," returned the Doctor.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," said Paul, looking innocently up into his awful face. "Ask them to take care of Diogenes, if you please."

Diogenes was the dog: who had never in his life received a friend into his confidence before Paul. The Doctor promised that every attention should be paid to Diogenes in Paul's absence, and Paul, having again thanked him, and shaken hands with him, bade adieu to Mrs. Blimber and Cornelia with such heartfelt earnestness, that Mrs. Blimber forgot from that

moment to mention Cicero to Lady Skettles, though she had fully intended it all the evening. Cornelia, taking both Paul's hands in hers, said, "Dombey, Dombey, you have always been my favourite pupil. God bless you!" And it showed, Paul thought, how easily one might do injustice to a person; for Miss Blimber meant it—though she *was* a Forcer—and felt it.

A buzz then went round among the young gentlemen of "Dombey's going!" "Little Dombey's going!" and there was a general move after Paul and Florence down the staircase and into the hall, in which the whole Blimber family were included. Such a circumstance, Mr. Feeder said aloud, as had never happened in the case of any former young gentleman within his experience; but it would be difficult to say if this were sober fact, or custard-cups. The servants, with the butler at their head, had all an interest in seeing Little Dombey go; and even the weak-eyed young man, taking out his books and trunks to the coach that was to carry him and Florence to Mrs. Pinchin's for the night, melted visibly.

Not even the influence of the softer passion on the young gentlemen—and they all, to a boy, doted on Florence—could restrain them from taking quite a noisy leave of Paul; waving hats after him, pressing down-stairs to shake hands with him, crying individually, "Dombey, don't forget me!" and indulging in many such ebullitions of feeling, uncommon among those young Chesterfields. Paul whispered Florence, as she wrapped him up before the door was opened, Did she hear them? Would she ever forget it? Was she glad to know it? And a lively delight was in his eyes as he spoke to her.

Once, for a last look, he turned and gazed upon the faces thus addressed to him, surprised to see how shining and how bright and numerous they were, and how they were all piled and heaped up, as faces are at crowded theatres. They swam before him as he looked, like faces in an agitated glass; and next moment he was in the dark coach outside, holding close to Florence. From that time, whenever he thought of Doctor Blimber's, it came back as he had seen it in this last view; and it never seemed to be a real place again, but always a dream, full of eyes.

This was not quite the last of Doctor Blimber's, however. There was something else. There was Mr. Toots. Who, unexpectedly letting down one of the coach windows, and looking in, said, with a most egregious chuckle, "Is Dombey there?" and immediately put it up again, without waiting for an answer. Nor was this

quite the last of Mr. Toots, even; for, before the coachman could drive off, he as suddenly let down the other window, and looking in with a precisely similar chuckle, said in a precisely similar tone of voice, "Is Dombey there?" and disappeared precisely as before.

How Florence laughed! Paul often remembered it, and laughed himself whenever he did so.

But there was much, soon afterwards—next day, and after that—which Paul could only recollect confusedly. As, why they stayed at Mrs. Pipchin's days and nights, instead of going home; why he lay in bed, with Florence sitting by his side; whether that had been his father in the room, or only a tall shadow on the wall; whether he had heard his doctor say, of some one, that if they had removed him before the occasion on which he had built up fancies, strong in proportion to his own weakness, it was very possible he might have pined away.

He could not even remember whether he had often said to Florence, "Oh, Floy, take me home, and never leave me!" but he thought he had. He fancied sometimes he had heard himself repeating, "Take me home, Floy! take me home!"

But he could remember, when he got home, and was carried up the well-remembered stairs, that there had been the rumbling of a coach for many hours together, while he lay upon the seat, with Florence still beside him, and old Mrs. Pipchin sitting opposite. He remembered his old bed, too, when they laid him down in it; his aunt, Miss Tox, and Susan: but there was something else, and recent, too, that still perplexed him.

"I want to speak to Florence, if you please," he said. "To Florence by herself, for a moment!"

She bent down over him, and the others stood away.

"Floy, my pet, wasn't that papa in the hall when they brought me from the coach?"

"Yes, dear."

"He didn't cry and go into his room, Floy, did he, when he saw me coming in?"

Florence shook her head, and pressed her lips against his cheek.

"I'm very glad he didn't cry," said little Paul. "I thought he did. Don't tell them that I asked."

CHAPTER XV.

AMAZING ARTFULNESS OF CAPTAIN CUTTLE, AND A
NEW PURSUIT FOR WALTER GAY.

WALTER could not, for several days, decide what to do in the Barbadoes business; and even cherished some faint hope that Mr. Dombey might not have meant what he had said, or that he might change his mind, and tell him he was not to go. But, as nothing occurred to give this idea (which was sufficiently improbable in itself) any touch of confirmation, and as time was slipping by, and he had none to lose, he felt that he must act, without hesitating any longer.

Walter's chief difficulty was, how to break the change in his affairs to Uncle Sol, to whom he was sensible it would be a terrible blow. He had the greater difficulty in dashing Uncle Sol's spirits with such an astounding piece of intelligence, because they had lately recovered very much, and the old man had become so cheerful, that the little back-parlour was itself again. Uncle Sol had paid the first appointed portion of the debt to Mr. Dombey, and was hopeful of working his way through the rest; and to cast him down afresh, when he had sprung up so manfully from his troubles, was a very distressing necessity.

Yet it would never do to run away from him. He must know of it beforehand; and how to tell him was the point. As to the question of going or not going, Walter did not consider that he had any power of choice in the matter. Mr. Dombey had truly told him that he was young, and that his uncle's circumstances were not good; and Mr. Dombey had plainly expressed, in the glance with which he had accompanied that reminder, that if he declined to go, he might stay at home if he chose, but not in his counting-house. His uncle and he lay under a great obligation to Mr. Dombey, which was of Walter's own soliciting. He might have begun in secret to despair of ever winning that gentleman's favour, and might have thought that he was now and then disposed to put a slight upon him, which was hardly just. But what would have been duty without that, was still duty with it—or Walter thought so—and duty must be done.

When Mr. Dombey had looked at him, and told him he was young, and that his uncle's circumstances were not good, there had been an expression of disdain in his face; a contemptuous and disparaging assumption that he would be

quite content to live idly on a reduced old man, which stung the boy's generous soul. Determined to assure Mr. Dombey, in so far as it was possible to give him the assurance without expressing it in words, that indeed he mistook his nature, Walter had been anxious to show even more cheerfulness and activity after the West Indian interview than he had shown before: if that were possible, in one of his quick and zealous disposition. He was too young and inexperienced to think, that possibly this very quality in him was not agreeable to Mr. Dombey, and that it was no stepping-stone to his good opinion to be elastic and hopeful of pleasing under the shadow of his powerful displeasure, whether it were right or wrong. But it may have been—it may have been—that the great man thought himself defied in this new exposition of an honest spirit, and purposed to bring it down.

"Well! at last and at least, Uncle Sol must be told," thought Walter with a sigh. And, as Walter was apprehensive that his voice might perhaps quaver a little, and that his countenance might not be quite as hopeful as he could wish it to be, if he told the old man himself, and saw the first effects of his communication on his wrinkled face, he resolved to avail himself of the services of that powerful mediator, Captain Cuttle. Sunday coming round, he set off, therefore, after breakfast, once more to beat up Captain Cuttle's quarters.

It was not unpleasant to remember, on the way thither, that Mrs. MacStinger resorted to a great distance every Sunday morning, to attend the ministry of the Reverend Melchisedech Howler, who, having been one day discharged from the West India Docks on a false suspicion (got up expressly against him by the general enemy) of screwing gimlets into puncheons, and applying his lips to the orifice, had announced the destruction of the world for that day two years, at ten in the morning, and opened a front parlour for the reception of ladies and gentlemen of the Ranting persuasion, upon whom, on the first occasion of their assemblage, the admonitions of the Reverend Melchisedech had produced so powerful an effect, that, in their rapturous performance of a sacred jig, which closed the service, the whole flock broke through into a kitchen below, and disabled a mangle belonging to one of the fold.

This the captain, in a moment of uncommon conviviality, had confided to Walter and his uncle, between the repetitions of Lovely Peg, on the night when Brogley the broker was paid out. The captain himself was punctual in his attendance at a church in his own neighbourhood,

which hoisted the union-jack every Sunday morning : and where he was good enough—the lawful beadle being infirm—to keep an eye upon the boys, over whom he exercised great power, in virtue of his mysterious hook. Knowing the regularity of the captain's habits, Walter made all the haste he could, that he might anticipate his going out ; and he made such good speed, that he had the pleasure, on turning into Brig Place, to behold the broad blue coat and waistcoat hanging out of the captain's open window, to air in the sun.

It appeared incredible that the coat and waistcoat could be seen by mortal eyes without the captain ; but he certainly was not in them, otherwise his legs—the houses in Brig Place not being lofty—would have obstructed the street-door, which was perfectly clear. Quite wondering at this discovery, Walter gave a single knock.

"Stinger," he distinctly heard the captain say, up in his room, as if that were no business of his. Therefore Walter gave two knocks.

"Cuttle," he heard the captain say upon that ; and immediately afterwards the captain, in his clean shirt and braces, with his neckerchief hanging loosely round his throat like a coil of rope, and his glazed hat on, appeared at the window, leaning out over the broad blue coat and waistcoat.

"Wal'r !" cried the captain, looking down upon him in amazement.

"Ay, ay, Captain Cuttle," returned Walter, "only me."

"What's the matter, my lad?" inquired the captain with great concern. "Gills an't been and sprung nothing again?"

"No, no," said Walter. "My uncle's all right, Captain Cuttle."

The captain expressed his gratification, and said he would come down below and open the door, which he did.

"Though you're early, Wal'r," said the captain, eyeing him still doubtfully, when they got up-stairs.

"Why, the fact is, Captain Cuttle," said Walter, sitting down, "I was afraid you would have gone out, and I want to benefit by your friendly counsel."

"So you shall," said the captain. "What'll you take?"

"I want to take your opinion, Captain Cuttle," returned Walter, smiling. "That's the only thing for me."

"Come on, then," said the captain. "With a will, my lad!"

Walter related to him what had happened ; and the difficulty in which he felt respecting his

uncle, and the relief it would be to him if Captain Cuttle, in his kindness, would help him to smooth it away ; Captain Cuttle's infinite consternation and astonishment at the prospect unfolded to him, gradually swallowing that gentleman up, until it left his face quite vacant, and the suit of blue, the glazed hat, and the hook apparently without an owner.

"You see, Captain Cuttle," pursued Walter, "for myself, I am young, as Mr. Dombey said, and not to be considered. I am to fight my way through the world, I know ; but there are two points I was thinking, as I came along, that I should be very particular about in respect to my uncle. I don't mean to say that I deserve to be the pride and delight of his life—you believe me, I know—but I am. Now, don't you think I am?"

The captain seemed to make an endeavour to rise from the depths of his astonishment, and get back to his face ; but the effort being ineffectual, the glazed hat merely nodded with a mute unutterable meaning.

"If I live and have my health," said Walter, "and I am not afraid of that, still, when I leave England, I can hardly hope to see my uncle again. He is old, Captain Cuttle ; and besides, his life is a life of custom——"

"Steady, Wal'r! Of a want of custom?" said the captain, suddenly reappearing.

"Too true," returned Walter, shaking his head ; "but I meant a life of habit, Captain Cuttle—that sort of custom. And if (as you very truly said, I am sure) he would have died the sooner for the loss of the stock, and all those objects to which he has been accustomed for so many years, don't you think he might die a little sooner for the loss of——"

"Of his nevy," interposed the captain. "Right!"

"Well, then," said Walter, trying to speak gaily, "we must do our best to make him believe that the separation is but a temporary one, after all ; but as I know better, or dread that, I know better, Captain Cuttle, and as I have so many reasons for regarding him with affection, and duty, and honour, I am afraid I should make but a very poor hand at that, if I tried to persuade him of it. That's my great reason for wishing you to break it 'out' to him ; and that's the first point."

"Keep her off a point or so!" observed the captain in a contemplative voice.

"What did you say, Captain Cuttle?" inquired Walter.

"Stand by!" returned the captain thoughtfully.

Walter paused to ascertain if the captain had any particular information to add to this, but, as he said no more, went on.

"Now, the second point, Captain Cuttle. I am sorry to say, I am not a favourite with Mr. Dombey. I have always tried to do my best, and I have always done it; but he does not like me. He can't help his likings and dislikings, perhaps. I say nothing of that. I only say that I am certain he does not like me. He does not send me to this post as a good one; he disdains to represent it as being better than it is; and I doubt very much if it will ever lead me to advancement in the House—whether it does not, on the contrary, dispose of me for ever, and put me out of the way. Now, we must say nothing of this to my uncle, Captain Cuttle, but must make it out to be as favourable and promising as we can; and when I tell you what it really is, I only do so that, in case any means should ever arise of lending me a hand so far off, I may have one friend at home who knows my real situation."

"Wal'r, my boy," replied the captain, "in the Proverbs of Solomon you will find the following words, 'May we never want a friend in need, nor a bottle to give him!' When found, make a note of."

Here the captain stretched out his hand to Walter, with an air of downright good faith that spoke volumes; at the same time repeating (for he felt proud of the accuracy and pointed application of his quotation), "When found, make a note of."

"Captain Cuttle," said Walter, taking the immense fist extended to him by the captain in both his hands, which it completely filled, "next to my Uncle Sol, I love you. There is no one on earth in whom I can more safely trust, I am sure. As to the mere going away, Captain Cuttle, I don't care for that: why should I care for that? If I were free to seek my own fortune—if I were free to go as a common sailor—if I were free to venture on my own account to the farthest end of the world—I would gladly go! I would have gladly gone, years ago, and taken my chance of what might come of it. But it was against my uncle's wishes, and against the plans he had formed for me; and there was an end of that. But what I feel, Captain Cuttle, is, that we have been a little mistaken all along, and that, so far as any improvement in my prospects is concerned, I am no better off now than I was when I first entered Dombey's House—perhaps a little worse, for the House may have been kindly inclined towards me then, and it certainly is not now."

"Turn again, Whittington," muttered the disconsolate captain, after looking at Walter for some time.

"Ay!" replied Walter, laughing, "and turn a great many times, too, Captain Cuttle, I'm afraid, before such fortune as his ever turns up again. Not that I complain," he added in his lively, animated, energetic way. "I have nothing to complain of. I am provided for. I can live. When I leave my uncle, I leave him to you; and I can leave him to no one better, Captain Cuttle. I haven't told you all this because I despair, not I; it's to convince you that I can't pick and choose in Dombey's House, and that where I am sent, there I must go, and what I am offered, that I must take. It's better for my uncle that I should be sent away; for Mr. Dombey is a valuable friend to him, as he proved himself, you know when, Captain Cuttle; and I am persuaded he won't be less valuable when he hasn't me there, every day, to awaken his dislike. So hurrah for the West Indies, Captain Cuttle! How does that tune go that the sailors sing?"

"For the Port of Barbadoes, boys!"

Cheerily!

Leaving old England behind us, boys!

Cheerily!"

Here the captain roared in chorus—

"Oh cheerily, cheerily!"

Oh cheer—i—ly!"

The last line reaching the quick ears of an ardent skipper not quite sober, who lodged opposite, and who instantly sprung out of bed, threw up his window, and joined in across the street, at the top of his voice, produced a fine effect. When it was impossible to sustain the concluding note any longer, the skipper belled forth a terrific "Ahoy!" intended in part as a friendly greeting, and in part to show that he was not at all breathless. That done, he shut down his window, and went to bed again.

"And now, Captain Cuttle," said Walter, handing him the blue coat and waistcoat, and bustling very much, "if you'll come and break the news to Uncle Sol (which he ought to have known days upon days ago, by rights), I'll leave you at the door, you know, and walk about until the afternoon."

The captain, however, scarcely appeared to relish the commission, or to be by any means confident of his powers of executing it. He had arranged the future life and adventures of Walter so very differently, and so entirely to his own satisfaction; he had felicitated himself so often on the sagacity and foresight displayed

in that arrangement, and had found it so complete and perfect in all its parts; that to suffer it to go to pieces all at once, and even to assist in breaking it up, required a great effort of his resolution. The captain, too, found it difficult to unload his old ideas upon the subject, and to take a perfectly new cargo on board, with that rapidity which the circumstances required, or without jumbling and confounding the two. Consequently, instead of putting on his coat and waistcoat with anything like the impetuosity that could alone have kept pace with Walter's mood, he declined to invest himself with those garments at all at present; and informed Walter that, on such a serious matter, he must be allowed to "bite his nails a bit."

"It's an old habit of mine, Wal'r," said the captain, "any time these fifty year. When you see Ned Cuttle bite his nails, Wal'r, then you may know that Ned Cuttle's aground."

Thereupon the captain put his iron hook between his teeth, as if it were a hand; and with an air of wisdom and profundity that was the very concentration and sublimation of all philosophical reflection and grave inquiry, applied himself to the consideration of the subject in its various branches.

"There's a friend of mine," murmured the captain in an absent manner, "but he's at present coasting round to Whitby, that would deliver such an opinion on this subject, or any other that could be named, as would give Parliament six and beat 'em. Been knocked overboard, that man," said the captain, "twice, and none the worse for it. Was beat in his apprenticeship, for three weeks (off and on), about the head with a ringbolt. And yet a clearer-minded man don't walk."

In spite of his respect for Captain Cuttle, Walter could not help inwardly rejoicing at the absence of this sage, and devoutly hoping that his intellect might not be brought to bear on his difficulties until they were quite settled.

"If you was to take and show that man the buoy at the Nore," said Captain Cuttle in the same tone, "and ask him his opinion of it, Wal'r, he'd give you an opinion that was no more like that buoy than your uncle's buttons are. There ain't a man that walks certainly not on two legs—that can come near him. Not near him!"

"What's his name, Captain Cuttle?" inquired Walter, determined to be interested in the captain's friend.

"His name's Bunzby," said the captain. "But Lord, it might be anything for the matter of that, with such a mind as his!"

The exact idea which the captain attached to this concluding piece of praise, he did not further elucidate; neither did Walter seek to draw it forth. For on his beginning to review, with the vivacity natural to himself and to his situation, the leading points in his own affairs, he soon discovered that the captain had relapsed into his former profound state of mind; and that, while he eyed him steadfastly from beneath his bushy eyebrows, he evidently neither saw nor heard him, but remained immersed in cogitation.

In fact, Captain Cuttle was labouring with such great designs, that far from being aground, he soon got off into the deepest of water, and could find no bottom to his penetration. By degrees it became perfectly plain to the captain that there was some mistake here; that it was undoubtedly much more likely to be Walter's mistake than his; that if there were really any West India scheme afoot, it was a very different one from what Walter, who was young and rash, supposed; and could only be some new device for making his fortune with unusual celerity. "Or if there should be any little hitch between 'em," thought the captain, meaning between Walter and Mr. Dombey, "it only wants a word in season, from a friend of both parties, to set it right and smooth, and make all taut again." Captain Cuttle's deduction from these considerations was, that as he already enjoyed the pleasure of knowing Mr. Dombey, from having spent a very agreeable half-hour in his company at Brighton (on the morning when they borrowed the money); and that, as a couple of men of the world, who understood each other, and were mutually disposed to make things comfortable, could easily arrange any little difficulty of this sort, and come at the real facts, the friendly thing for him to do would be, without saying anything about it to Walter at present, just to step up to Mr. Dombey's house—say to the servant, "Would you be so good, my lad, as to report Cap'n Cuttle here?"—meet Mr. Dombey in a confidential spirit—hook him by the button-hole—talk it over—make it all right—and come away triumphant.

As these reflections presented themselves to the captain's mind, and by slow degrees assumed this shape and form, his visage cleared like a doubtful morning when it gives place to a bright noon. His eyebrows, which had been in the highest degree portentous, smoothed their rugged, bristling aspect, and became serene; his eyes, which had been nearly closed in the severity of his mental exercise, opened freely; a smile, which had been at first but three specks

—one at the right-hand corner of his mouth, and one at the corner of each eye—gradually overspread his whole face, and rippling up into his forehead, lifted the glazed hat: as if that, too, had been aground with Captain Cuttle, and were now, like him, happily afloat again.

Finally, the captain left off biting his nails, and said, "Now, Wal'r, my boy, you may help me on with them slops." By which the captain meant his coat and waistcoat.

Walter little imagined why the captain was so particular in the arrangement of his cravat as to twist the pendent ends into a sort of pigtail, and pass them through a massive gold ring with a picture of a tomb upon it, and a neat iron railing, and a tree, in memory of some deceased friend. Nor why the captain pulled up his shirt collar to the utmost limits allowed by the Irish linen below, and by so doing decorated himself with a complete pair of blinkers; nor why he changed his shoes, and put on an unparalleled pair of ankle-jacks, which he only wore on extraordinary occasions. The captain, being at length attired to his own complete satisfaction, and having glanced at himself from head to foot in a shaving-glass, which he removed from a nail for that purpose, took up his knotted stick, and said he was ready.

The captain's walk was more complacent than usual when they got out into the street; but this Walter supposed to be the effect of the ankle-jacks, and took little heed of. Before they had gone very far, they encountered a woman selling flowers; when the captain, stopping short, as if struck by a happy idea, made a purchase of the largest bundle in her basket; a most glorious nosegay, fan-shaped, some two feet and a half round, and composed of all the jolliest-looking flowers that blow.

Armed with this little token, which he designed for Mr. Dombey, Captain Cuttle walked on with Walter until they reached the instrument-maker's door, before which they both paused.

"You're going in?" said Walter.

"Yes," returned the captain, who felt that Walter must be got rid of before he proceeded any further, and that he had better time his projected visit somewhat later in the day.

"And you won't forget anything?" said Walter.

"No," returned the captain.

"I'll go upon my walk at once," said Walter, "and then I shall be out of the way, Captain Cuttle."

"Take a good long 'un, my lad!" replied the captain, calling after him. Walter waved his hand in assent, and went his way.

His way was nowhere in particular; but he thought he would go out into the fields, where he could reflect upon the unknown life before him, and, resting under some tree, ponder quietly. He knew no better fields than those near Hampstead, and no better means of getting at them than by passing Mr. Dombey's house.

It was as stately and as dark as ever; when he went by and glanced up at its frowning front. The blinds were all pulled down, but the upper windows stood wide open, and the pleasant air stirring those curtains, and waving them to and fro, was the only sign of animation in the whole exterior. Walter walked softly as he passed, and was glad when he had left the house a door or two behind.

He looked back then; with the interest he had always felt for the place since the adventure of the lost child, years ago; and looked especially at those upper windows. While he was thus engaged, a chariot drove to the door, and a portly gentleman in black, with a heavy watch-chain, alighted, and went in. When he afterwards remembered this gentleman and his equipage together, Walter had no doubt he was a physician; and then he wondered who was ill; but the discovery did not occur to him until he had walked some distance, thinking listlessly of other things.

Though still, of what the house had suggested to him; for Walter pleased himself with thinking that perhaps the time might come when the beautiful child who was his old friend, and had always been so grateful to him and so glad to see him since, might interest her brother in his behalf, and influence his fortunes for the better. He liked to imagine this—more, at that moment, for the pleasure of imagining her continued remembrance of him than for any worldly profit he might gain; but another and more sober fancy whispered to him that, if he were alive then, he would be beyond the sea and forgotten; she married, rich, proud, happy. There was no more reason why she should remember him with any interest in such an altered state of things, than any plaything she ever had. No, not so much.

Yet Walter so idealised the pretty child whom he had found wandering in the rough streets, and so identified her with her innocent gratitude of that night, and the simplicity and truth of its expression, that he blushed for himself as a libeller when he argued that she could ever grow proud. On the other hand, his meditations were of that fantastic order that it seemed hardly less libellous in him to imagine her grown a woman: to think of her as anything but the

same artless, gentle, winning little creature that she had been in the days of Good Mrs. Brown. In a word, Walter found out that to reason with himself about Florence at all, was to become very unreasonable indeed; and that he could

do no better than preserve her image in his mind as something precious, unattainable, unchangeable, and indefinite—indefinite in all but its power of giving him pleasure, and restraining him like an angel's hand from anything unworthy.



"BEFORE THEY HAD GONE VERY FAR, THEY ENCOUNTERED A WOMAN SELLING FLOWERS; WHEN THE CAPTAIN, STOPPING SHORT, AS IF STRUCK BY A HAPPY IDEA, MADE A PURCHASE OF THE LARGEST BUNDLE IN HER BASKET."

It was a long stroll in the fields that Walter took that day, listening to the birds, and the Sunday bells, and the softened murmur of the town—breathing sweet scents; glancing sometimes at the dim horizon beyond which his voyage and his place of destination lay; then

looking round on the green English grass and the home landscape. But he hardly once thought even of going away, distinctly; and seemed to put off reflection idly, from hour to hour, and from minute to minute, while he yet went on reflecting all the time.

Walter had left the fields behind him, and was plodding homeward in the same abstracted mood, when he heard a shout from a man, and then a woman's voice calling to him loudly by name. Turning quickly in his surprise, he saw that a hackney coach, going in the contrary direction, had stopped at no great distance; that the coachman was looking back from his box, and making signals to him with his whip; and that a young woman inside was leaning out of the window, and beckoning with immense energy. Rushing up to this coach, he found that the young woman was Miss Nipper, and that Miss Nipper was in such a flutter as to be almost beside herself.

"Staggs's Gardens, Mr. Walter!" said Miss Nipper; "if you please, oh do!"

"Eh?" cried Walter. "What is the matter?"

"Oh, Mr. Walter, Staggs's Gardens, if you please!" said Susan.

"There!" cried the coachman, appealing to Walter, with a sort of exulting despair; "that's the way the young lady's been a-goin' on for up'ards of a mortal hour, and me continually backing out of no thoroughfares, where she *would* drive up. I've had a many fares in this coach, first and last, but never such a fare as her."

"Do you want to go to Staggs's Gardens, Susan?" inquired Walter.

"Ah! *She* wants to go there! WHERE IS IT?" growled the coachman.

"I don't know where it is!" exclaimed Susan wildly. "Mr. Walter, I was there once myself, along with Miss Floy and our poor darling Master Paul, on the very day when you found Miss Floy in the City, for we lost her coming home, Mrs. Richards and me, and a mad bull, and Mrs. Richards's eldest, and though I went there afterwards, I can't remember where it is, I think it's sunk into the ground. Oh, Mr. Walter, don't desert me, Staggs's Gardens, if you please! Miss Floy's darling—all our darlings—little meek, meek Master Paul! Oh, Mr. Walter!"

"Good God!" cried Walter. "Is he very ill?"

"The pretty flower!" cried Susan, wringing her hands, "has took the fancy that he'd like to see his old nurse, and I've come to bring her to his bedside, Mrs. Staggs's of Polly Toodle's Gardens, some one pray!"

Greatly moved by what he heard, and catching Susan's earnestness immediately, Walter, now that he understood the nature of her errand, dashed into it with such ardour that the coachman had enough to do to follow closely as he

ran before, inquiring here and there and everywhere the way to Staggs's Gardens.

There was no such place as Staggs's Gardens. It had vanished from the earth. Where the old rotten summer-houses once had stood, palaces now reared their heads, and granite columns of gigantic girth opened a vista to the railway world beyond. The miserable waste ground, where the refuse matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frouzy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise. The old by-streets now swarmed with passengers and vehicles of every kind: the new streets, that had stopped disheartened in the mud and waggon-ruts, formed towns within themselves, originating wholesome comforts and conveniences belonging to themselves, and never tried nor thought of until they sprung into existence. Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks. The carcases of houses, and beginnings of new thoroughfares, had started off upon the line at steam's own speed, and shot away into the country in a monster train.

As to the neighbourhood which had hesitated to acknowledge the railroad in its straggling days, that had grown wise and penitent, as any Christian might in such a case, and now boasted of its powerful and prosperous relation. There were railway patterns in its drapers' shops, and railway journals in the windows of its newsmen. There were railway hotels, coffee-houses, lodging-houses, boarding-houses; railway plans, maps, views, wrappers, bottles, sandwich-boxes, and time-tables; railway hackney-coach and cab stands; railway omnibuses, railway streets and buildings, railway hangers-on and parasites, and flatterers out of all calculation. There was even railway time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in. Among the vanquished was the master chimney-sweeper, whilom incredulous at Staggs's Gardens, who now lived in a stuccoed house three stories high, and gave himself out, with golden flourishes upon a varnished board, as contractor for the cleansing of railway chimneys by machinery.

To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood. Crowds of people, and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours, produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action. The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips. Wonderful members of Parliament, who, little more than twenty years before, had made themselves merry with the

wild railroad theories of engineers, and given them the liveliest rubs in cross-examination, went down into the north with their watches in their hands, and sent on messages before by the electric telegraph to say that they were coming. Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved.

But Staggs's Gardens had been cut up root and branch. Oh, woe the day! when "not a rood of English ground"—laid out in Staggs's Gardens—is secure!

At last, after much fruitless inquiry, Walter, followed by the coach and Susan, found a man who had once resided in that vanished land, and who was no other than the master sweep before referred to, grown stout, and knocking a double knock at his own door. He knewed Toodle, he said, well. Belonged to the Railroad, didn't he?

"Yes, sir, yes!" cried Susan Nipper from the coach window.

Where did he live now? hastily inquired Walter.

He lived in the company's own buildings, second turning to the right, down the yard, cross over, and take the second on the right again. It was number eleven; they couldn't mistake it; but if they did, they had only to ask for Toodle, Engine Fireman, and any one would show them which was his house. At this unexpected stroke of success, Susan Nipper dismounted from the coach with all speed, took Walter's arm, and set off at a breathless pace on foot; leaving the coach there to await their return.

"Has the little boy been long ill, Susan?" inquired Walter as they hurried on.

"Ailing for a deal of time, but no one knew how much," said Susan; adding, with excessive sharpness, "Oh, them Blimbers!"

"Blimbers?" echoed Walter.

"I couldn't forgive myself at such a time as this, Mr. Walter," said Susan, "and when there's so much serious distress to think about, if I rested hard on any one, especially on them that little darling Paul speaks well of, but I *may* wish that the family was set to work in a stony soil to make new roads, and that Miss Blimber went in front, and had the pickaxe!"

Miss Nipper then took breath, and went on faster than before, as if this extraordinary aspira-

tion had relieved her. Walter, who had by this time no breath of his own to spare, hurried along without asking any more questions; and they soon, in their impatience, burst in at a little door, and came into a clean parlour full of children.

"Where's Mrs. Richards?" exclaimed Susan Nipper, looking round. "Oh, Mrs. Richards, Mrs. Richards, come along with me, my dear creetur!"

"Why, if it ain't Susan!" cried Polly, rising with her honest face and motherly figure from among the group, in great surprise.

"Yes, Mrs. Richards, it's me," said Susan, "and I wish it wasn't, though I may not seem to flatter when I say so, but little Master Paul is very ill, and told his pa to-day that he would like to see the face of his old nurse, and him and Miss Floy hope you'll come along with me—and Mr. Walter, Mrs. Richards—forgetting what is past, and do a kindness to the sweet dear that is withering away. Oh, Mrs. Richards, withering away!" Susan Nipper crying, Polly shed tears to see her, and to hear what she had said; and all the children gathered round (including numbers of new babies); and Mr. Toodle, who had just come home from Birmingham, and was eating his dinner out of a basin, laid down his knife and fork, and put on his wife's bonnet and shawl for her, which were hanging up behind the door; then tapped her on the back; and said, with more fatherly feeling than eloquence, "Polly! cut away!"

So they got back to the coach, long before the coachman expected them; and Walter, putting Susan and Mrs. Richards inside, took his seat on the box himself, that there might be no more mistakes, and deposited them safely in the hall of Mr. Dombey's house—where, by-the-bye, he saw a mighty nosegay lying, which reminded him of the one Captain Cuttle had purchased in his company that morning. He would have lingered to know more of the young invalid, or waited any length of time to see if he could render the least service; but, painfully sensible that such conduct would be looked upon by Mr. Dombey as presumptuous and forward, he turned slowly, sadly, anxiously, away.

He had not gone five minutes' walk from the door, when a man came running after him, and begged him to return. Walter retraced his steps as quickly as he could, and entered the gloomy house with a sorrowful foreboding.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE WAVES WERE ALWAYS SAYING.

PAUL had never risen from his little bed. He lay there, listening to the noises in the street, quite tranquilly; not caring much how the time went, but watching it, and watching everything about him, with observing eyes.

When the sunbeams struck into his room through the rustling blinds, and quivered on the opposite wall like golden water, he knew that evening was coming on, and that the sky was red and beautiful. As the reflection died away, and a gloom went creeping up the wall, he watched it deepen, deepen, deepen into night. Then he thought how the long streets were dotted with lamps, and how the peaceful stars were shining overhead. His fancy had a strange tendency to wander to the river, which he knew was flowing through the great city: and now he thought how black it was, and how deep it would look, reflecting the hosts of stars—and more than all, how steadily it rolled away to meet the sea.

As it grew later in the night, and footsteps in the street became so rare that he could hear them coming, count them as they passed, and lose them in the hollow distance, he would lie and watch the many-coloured ring about the candle, and wait patiently for day. His only trouble was, the swift and rapid river. He felt forced, sometimes, to try to stop it—to stem it with his childish hands—or choke its way with sand—and when he saw it coming on, resistless, he cried out. But a word from Florence, who was always at his side, restored him to himself; and leaning his poor head upon her breast, he told Floy of his dream, and smiled.

When day began to dawn again, he watched for the sun; and when its cheerful light began to sparkle in the room, he pictured to himself—pictured! he saw—the high church towers rising up into the morning sky, the town reviving, waking, starting into life once more, the river glistening as it rolled (but rolling fast as ever), and the country bright with dew. Familiar sounds and cries came by degrees into the street below; the servants in the house were roused and busy; faces looked in at the door, and voices asked his attendants softly how he was. Paul answered for himself; “I am better. I am a great deal better, thank you. Tell papa so!”

By little and little he got tired of the bustle

of the day, the noise of carriages and carts, and people passing and re-passing; and would fall asleep, or be troubled with a restless and uneasy sense again—the child could hardly tell whether this were in his sleeping or his waking moments—of that rushing river. “Why, will it never stop, Floy?” he would sometimes ask her. “It is bearing me away, I think!”

But Floy could always soothe and reassure him; and it was his daily delight to make her lay her head down on his pillow, and take some rest.

“You are always watching me, Floy. Let me watch *you*, now!” They would prop him up with cushions in a corner of his bed, and there he would recline the while she lay beside him: bending forward oftentimes to kiss her, and whispering to those who were near that she was tired, and how she had sat up so many nights beside him.

Thus, the flush of the day, in its heat and light, would gradually decline; and again the golden water would be dancing on the wall.

He was visited by as many as three grave doctors—they used to assemble down-stairs, and come up together—and the room was so quiet, and Paul was so observant of them (though he never asked of anybody what they said), that he even knew the difference in the sound of their watches. But his interest centred in Sir Parker Peps, who always took his seat on the side of the bed. For Paul had heard them say, long ago, that that gentleman had been with his mamma when she clasped Florence in her arms, and died. And he could not forget it, now. He liked him for it. He was not afraid.

The people round him changed as unaccountably as on that first night at Doctor Blimber’s—except Florence; Florence never changed—and what had been Sir Parker Peps was now his father, sitting with his head upon his hand. Old Mrs. Pipchin, dozing in an easy-chair, often changed to Miss Tox, or his aunt; and Paul was quite content to shut his eyes again, and see what happened next without emotion. But this figure with its head upon its hand returned so often, and remained so long, and sat so still and solemn, never speaking, never being spoken to, and rarely lifting up its face, that Paul began to wonder languidly if it were real; and in the night-time saw it sitting there with fear.

“Floy!” he said. “What *is* that?”

“Where, dearest?”

“There! at the bottom of the bed.”

“There’s nothing there, except papa!”

The figure lifted up its head, and rose, and coming to the bedside, said: “My own boy! Don’t you know me?”

Paul looked it in the face, and thought, was this his father? But the face, so altered to his thinking, thrilled while he gazed, as if it were in pain; and before he could reach out both his hands to take it between them, and draw it towards him, the figure turned away quickly from the little bed, and went out at the door.

Paul looked at Florence with a fluttering heart, but he knew what she was going to say, and stopped her with his face against her lips. The next time he observed the figure sitting at the bottom of the bed, he called to it.

"Don't be so sorry for me, dear papa! Indeed, I am quite happy!"

His father coming, and bending down to him—which he did quickly, and without first pausing by the bedside—Paul held him round the neck, and repeated those words to him several times, and very earnestly; and Paul never saw him in his room again at any time, whether it were day or night, but he called out, "Don't be so sorry for me! Indeed, I am quite happy!" This was the beginning of his always saying in the morning that he was a great deal better, and that they were to tell his father so.

How many times the golden water danced upon the top; how many nights the dark, dark river rolled towards the sea in spite of him; Paul never counted, never sought to know. If their kindness, or his sense of it, could have increased, they were more kind, and he more grateful, every day; but whether they were many days, or few, appeared of little moment now to the gentle boy.

One night he had been thinking of his mother, and her picture in the drawing-room down-stairs, and had thought she must have loved sweet Florence better than his father did, to have held her in her arms when she felt that she was dying—for even he, her brother, who had such dear love for her, could have no greater wish than that. The train of thought suggested to him to inquire if he had ever seen his mother: for he could not remember whether they had told him yes or no, the river running very fast, and confusing his mind.

"Floy, did I ever see mamma?"

"No, darling: why?"

"Did I never see any kind face, like mamma's, looking at me when I was a baby, Floy?"

He asked incredulously, as if he had some vision of a face before him.

"Oh yes, dear!"

"Whose, Floy?"

"Your old nurse's. Often."

"And where is my old nurse?" said Paul.

"Is she dead, too? Floy, are we *all* dead, except you?"

There was a hurry in the room for an instant—longer, perhaps; but it seemed no more—then all was still again; and Florence, with her face quite colourless, but smiling, held his head upon her arm. Her arm trembled very much.

"Show me that old nurse, Floy, if you please!"

"She is not here, darling. She shall come to-morrow."

"Thank you, Floy!"

Paul closed his eyes with those words, and fell asleep. When he awoke the sun was high, and the broad day was clear and warm. He lay a little, looking at the windows, which were open, and the curtains rustling in the air, and waving to and fro: then he said, "Floy, is it to-morrow? Is she come?"

Some one seemed to go in quest of her. Perhaps it was Susan. Paul thought he heard her telling him, when he had closed his eyes again, that she would soon be back; but he did not open them to see. She kept her word—perhaps she had never been away—but the next thing that happened was a noise of footsteps on the stairs, and then Paul woke—woke, mind and body—and sat upright in his bed. He saw them now about him. There was no grey mist before them, as there had been sometimes in the night. He knew them every one, and called them by their names.

"And who is this? Is this my old nurse?" said the child, regarding with a radiant smile a figure coming in.

Yes, yes. No other stranger would have shed those tears at sight of him, and called him her dear boy, her pretty boy, her own poor blighted child. No other woman would have stooped down by his bed, and taken up his wasted hand, and put it to her lips and breast, as one who had some right to fondle it. No other woman would have so forgotten everybody there but him and Floy, and been so full of tenderness and pity.

"Floy! this is a kind, good face!" said Paul. "I am glad to see it again. Don't go away, old nurse! Stay here!"

His senses were all quickened, and he heard a name he knew.

"Who was that who said 'Walter?'" he asked, looking round. "Some one said 'Walter.' Is he here? I should like to see him very much."

Nobody replied directly; but his father soon said to Susan, "Call him back, then: let him come up!" After a short pause of expectation, during which he looked with smiling interest and wonder on his nurse, and saw that she had

not forgotten Floy, Walter was brought into the room. His open face and manner, and his cheerful eyes, had always made him a favourite with Paul; and when Paul saw him, he stretched out his hand, and said, "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, my child!" cried Mrs. Pipchin, hurrying to his bed's head. "Not good-bye?"

For an instant Paul looked at her with the wistful face with which he had so often gazed upon her in his corner by the fire. "Ah, yes," he said placidly, "good-bye! Walter dear, good-bye!"—turning his head to where he stood, and putting out his hand again. "Where is papa?"

He felt his father's breath upon his cheek before the words had parted from his lips.

"Remember Walter, dear papa," he whispered, looking in his face. "Remember Walter. I was fond of Walter!" The feeble hand waved in the air as if it cried "Good-bye!" to Walter once again.

"Now lay me down," he said, "and, Floy, come close to me and let me see you!"

Sister and brother wound their arms around each other, and the golden light came streaming in, and fell upon them, locked together.

"How fast the river runs, between its green banks and the rushes, Floy! But it's very near the sea. I hear the waves! They always said so."

Presently he told her that the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest. How green the banks were now, how bright the flowers growing on them, and how tall the rushes! Now the boat was out at sea, but gliding smoothly on. And now there was a shore before him. Who stood on the bank?—

He put his hands together, as he had been used to do at his prayers. He did not remove his arms to do it; but they saw him fold them so, behind her neck.

"Mamma is like you, Floy. I know her by the face! But tell them that the print upon the stairs at school is not divine enough. The light about the head is shining on me as I go!"

The golden ripple on the wall came back again, and nothing else stirred in the room. The old, old fashion! The fashion that came in with our first garments, and will last unchanged until our race has run its course, and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll. The old, old fashion—Death!

Oh, thank God, all who see it, for that older fashion yet, of Immortality! And look upon us, angels of young children, with regards not quite estranged, when the swift river bears us to the ocean!

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTAIN CUTTLE DOES A LITTLE BUSINESS FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE.



CAPTAIN CUTTLE, in the exercise of that surprising talent for deep-laid and unfathomable scheming with which (as is not unusual in men of transparent simplicity) he sincerely believed himself to be endowed by nature, had gone to Mr. Dombey's house, on the eventful Sunday, winking all the way as a vent for his superfluous sagacity, and had presented himself in the full lustre of the ankle-jacks before the eyes of Towlinson. Hearing from that individual, to his great concern, of the impending calamity, Captain Cuttle, in his delicacy, sheered off again confounded; merely handing in the nosegay as a small mark of his solicitude, and leaving his respectful compliments for the family in general, which he accompanied with an expression of his hope that they would lay their heads well to the wind under existing circumstances, and a friendly intimation that he would "look up again" to-morrow.

The captain's compliments were never heard of any more. The captain's nosegay, after lying in the hall all night, was swept into the dust-bin next morning; and the captain's sly arrangement, involved in one catastrophe with greater hopes and loftier designs, was crushed to pieces. So, when an avalanche bears down a mountain forest, twigs and bushes suffer with the trees, and all perish together.

When Walter returned home on the Sunday evening from his long walk, and its memorable close, he was too much occupied at first by the tidings he had to give them, and by the emotions naturally awakened in his breast by the scene through which he had passed, to observe either that his uncle was evidently unacquainted with the intelligence the captain had undertaken to impart, or that the captain made signals with his hook, warning him to avoid the subject. Not that the captain's signals were calculated to have proved very comprehensible, however attentively observed; for, like those Chinese sages who are said in their conferences to write certain learned words in the air that are wholly impossible of pronunciation, the captain made such waves and flourishes as nobody, without a previous knowledge of his mystery, would have been at all likely to understand.

Captain Cuttle, however, becoming cognizant of what had happened, relinquished these at-

tempts, as he perceived the slender chance that now existed of his being able to obtain a little easy chat with Mr. Dombey before the period of Walter's departure. But in admitting to himself, with a disappointed and crest-fallen countenance, that Sol Gills must be told, and that Walter must go—taking the case for the present as he found it, and not having it enlightened or improved beforehand by the knowing management of a friend—the captain still felt an unabated confidence that he, Ned Cuttle, was the man for Mr. Dombey; and that, to set Walter's fortunes quite square, nothing was wanted but that they two should come together. For the captain never could forget how well he and Mr. Dombey had got on at Brighton; with what nicety each of them had put in a word when it was wanted; how exactly they had taken one another's measure; nor how Ned Cuttle had pointed out that resource in the first extremity, and had brought the interview to the desired termination. On all these grounds the captain soothed himself with thinking that though Ned Cuttle was forced, by the pressure of events, to "stand by" almost useless for the present, Ned would fetch up with a wet sail in good time, and carry all before him.

Under the influence of this good-natured delusion, Captain Cuttle even went so far as to revolve in his own bosom, while he sat looking at Walter, and listening with a tear on his shirt collar to what he related, whether it might not be at once genteel and politic to give Mr. Dombey a verbal invitation, whenever they should meet, to come and cut his mutton in Brig Place on some day of his own naming, and enter on the question of his young friend's prospects over a social glass. But the uncertain temper of Mrs. MacStinger, and the possibility of her setting up her rest in the passage during such an entertainment, and there delivering some homily of an uncomplimentary nature, operated as a check on the captain's hospitable thoughts, and rendered him timid of giving them encouragement.

One fact was quite clear to the captain, as Walter, sitting thoughtfully over his untasted dinner, dwelt on all that had happened; namely, that however Walter's modesty might stand in the way of his perceiving it himself, he was, as one might say, a member of Mr. Dombey's family. He had been, in his own person, connected with the incident he so pathetically described; he had been by name remembered and commended in close association with it; and his fortunes must have a particular interest in his employer's eyes. If the captain had any lurking doubt whatever of his own conclusions, he had

not the least doubt that they were good conclusions for the peace of mind of the instrument-maker. Therefore he availed himself of so favourable a moment for breaking the West Indian intelligence to his old friend as a piece of extraordinary preferment; declaring that, for his part, he would freely give a hundred thousand pounds (if he had it) for Walter's gain in the long-run, and that he had no doubt such an investment would yield a handsome premium.

Solomon Gills was at first stunned by the communication, which fell upon the little back-parlour like a thunderbolt, and tore up the hearth savagely. But the captain flashed such golden prospects before his dim sight: hinted so mysteriously at Whittingtonian consequences: laid such emphasis on what Walter had just now told them: and appealed to it so confidently as a corroboration of his predictions, and a great advance towards the realisation of the romantic legend of Lovely Peg: that he bewildered the old man. Walter, for his part, feigned to be so full of hope and ardour, and so sure of coming home again soon, and backed up the captain with such expressive shakings of his head and rubbings of his hands, that Solomon, looking first at him and then at Captain Cuttle, began to think he ought to be transported with joy.

"But I'm behind the time, you understand," he observed in apology, passing his hand nervously down the whole row of bright buttons on his coat, and then up again, as if they were beads, and he were telling them twice over: "and I would rather have my dear boy here. It's an old-fashioned notion, I dare say. He was always fond of the sea. He's"—and he looked wistfully at Walter—"he's glad to go."

"Uncle Sol!" cried Walter quickly, "if you say that, I *won't* go. No, Captain Cuttle, I won't. If my uncle thinks I could be glad to leave him, though I was going to be made Governor of all the islands in the West Indies, that's enough. I'm a fixture."

"Wal'r, my lad," said the captain, "steady! Sol Gills, take an observation of your nevy."

Following with his eyes the majestic action of the captain's hook, the old man looked at Walter.

"Here is a certain craft," said the captain, with a magnificent sense of the allegory into which he was soaring, "a-going to put out on a certain voyage. What name is wrote upon that craft indelibly? Is it The Gay? or," said the captain, raising his voice as much as to say, observe the point of this, "is it The Gills?"

"Ned," said the old man, drawing Walter to his side, and taking his arm tenderly through

his, "I know. I know. Of course I know that Wally considers me more than himself always. That's in my mind. When I say he is glad to go, I mean I hope he is. Eh? Look you, Ned, and you too, Wally, my dear, this is new and unexpected to me: and I'm afraid my being behind the time, and poor, is at the bottom of it. Is it really good fortune for him, do you tell me now?" said the old man, looking anxiously from one to the other. "Really and truly? Is it?" I can reconcile myself to almost anything that advances Wally, but I won't have Wally putting himself at any disadvantage for me, or keeping anything from me. You, Ned Cuttle!" said the old man, fastening on the captain, to the manifest confusion of that diplomatist, "are you dealing plainly by your old friend? Speak out, Ned Cuttle. Is there anything behind? Ought he to go? How do you know it first, and why?"

As it was a contest of affection and self-denial, Walter struck in with infinite effect, to the captain's relief; and between them they tolerably reconciled old Sol Gills, by continued talking, to the project; or rather, so confused him, that nothing, not even the pain of separation, was distinctly clear to his mind.

He had not much time to balance the matter; for, on the very next day, Walter received from Mr. Carker the manager the necessary credentials for his passage and outfit, together with the information that the Son and Heir would sail in a fortnight, or within a day or two afterwards at latest. In the hurry of preparation: which Walter purposely enhanced as much as possible: the old man lost what little self-possession he ever had: and so the time of departure drew on rapidly.

The captain, who did not fail to make himself acquainted with all that passed, through inquiries of Walter from day to day, found the time still tending on towards his going away, without any occasion offering itself, or seeming likely to offer itself, for a better understanding of his position. It was after much consideration of this fact, and much pondering over such an unfortunate combination of circumstances, that a bright idea occurred: to the captain. Suppose he made a call on Mr. Carker, and tried to find out from him how the land really lay?

Captain Cuttle liked this idea very much. It came upon him in a moment of inspiration, as he was smoking an early pipe in Brig Place after breakfast; and it was worthy of the tobacco. It would quiet his conscience, which was an honest one, and was made a little uneasy by what Walter had confided to him, and what Sol Gills

had said; and it would be a deep, shrewd act of friendship. He would sound Mr. Carker carefully, and say much or little, just as he read that gentleman's character, and discovered that they got on well together or the reverse.

Accordingly, without the fear of Walter before his eyes (who he knew was at home packing), Captain Cuttle again assumed his ankle-jacks and mourning brooch, and issued forth on this second expedition. He purchased no propitiatory nosegay on the present occasion, as he was going to a place of business; but he put a small sunflower in his button-hole, to give himself an agreeable relish of the country; and with this, and the knobby stick, and the glazed hat, bore down upon the offices of Dombey and Son.

After taking a glass of warm rum-and-water at a tavern close by, to collect his thoughts, the captain made a rush down the court, lest its good effects should evaporate, and appeared suddenly to Mr. Perch.

"Matey," said the captain in persuasive accents, "one of your governors is named Carker."

Mr. Perch admitted it; but gave him to understand, as in official duty bound, that all his governors were engaged, and never expected to be disengaged any more.

"Lookee here, matey," said the captain in his ear; "my name's Cap'en Cuttle."

The captain would have hooked Perch gently to him, but Mr. Perch eluded the attempt; not so much in design, as in starting at the sudden thought that such a weapon, unexpectedly exhibited to Mrs. Perch, might, in her then condition, be destructive to that lady's hopes.

"If you'll be so good as just report Cap'en Cuttle here when you get a chance," said the captain, "I'll wait."

Saying which, the captain took his seat on Mr. Perch's bracket, and drawing out his handkerchief from the crown of the glazed hat, which he jammed between his knees (without injury to its shape, for nothing human could bend it), rubbed his head well all over, and appeared refreshed. He subsequently arranged his hair with his hook, and sat looking round the office, contemplating the clerks with a serene aspect.

The captain's equanimity was so impenetrable, and he was altogether so mysterious a being, that Perch the messenger was daunted.

"What name was it you said?" asked Mr. Perch, bending down over him as he sat on the bracket.

"Cap'en," in a deep hoarse whisper.

"Yes," said Mr. Perch, keeping time with his head.

"Cuttle."

"Oh!" said Mr. Perch in the same tone, for he caught it, and couldn't help it; the captain, in his diplomacy, was so impressive. "I'll see if he's disengaged now. I don't know. Perhaps he may be for a minute."

"Ay, ay, my lad, I won't detain him longer than a minute," said the captain, nodding with all the weighty importance that he felt within him. Perch, soon returning, said, "Will Captain Cuttle walk this way?"

Mr. Carker, the manager, standing on the hearth-rug before the empty fire-place, which was ornamented with a castellated sheet of brown paper, looked at the captain, as he came in, with no very special encouragement.

"Mr. Carker?" said Captain Cuttle.

"I believe so," said Mr. Carker, showing all his teeth.

The captain liked his answering with a smile: it looked pleasant. "You see," began the captain, rolling his eyes slowly round the little room, and taking in as much of it as his shirt collar permitted; "I'm a seafaring man myself, Mr. Carker, and Wal'r, as is on your books here, is a most a son of mine."

"Walter Gay?" said Mr. Carker, showing all his teeth again.

"Wal'r Gay it is," replied the captain, "right!" The captain's manner expressed a warm approval of Mr. Carker's quickness of perception. "I'm a intimate friend of his and his uncle's. Perhaps," said the captain, "you may have heard your head governor mention my name?—Captain Cuttle."

"No!" said Mr. Carker, with a still wider demonstration than before.

"Well," resumed the captain, "I've the pleasure of his acquaintance. I waited upon him down on the Sussex coast there, with my young friend Wal'r, when—in short, when there was a little accommodation wanted." The captain nodded his head in a manner that was at once comfortable, easy, and expressive, "You remember, I dare say?"

"I think," said Mr. Carker, "I had the honour of arranging the business."

"To be sure!" returned the captain. "Right again! you had. Now, I've took the liberty of coming here—"

"Won't you sit down?" said Mr. Carker, smiling.

"Thankee," returned the captain, availing himself of the offer. "A man does get more way upon himself, perhaps, in his conversation, when he sits down. Won't you take a cheer yourself?"

"No, thank you," said the manager, standing, perhaps from the force of winter habit, with his back against the chimney-piece, and looking down upon the captain with an-eye in every tooth and gum. "You have taken the liberty, you were going to say—though it's none—"

"Thankee kindly, my lad," returned the captain. "Of coming here on account of my friend, Wal'r. Sol Gills, his uncle, is a man of science, and in science he may be considered a clipper; but he ain't what I should altogether call a able seaman—not a man of practice. Wal'r is as trim a lad as ever stepped; but he's a little down by the head in one respect, and that is modesty. Now, what I would wish to put to you," said the captain, lowering his voice, and speaking in a kind of confidential growl, "in a friendly way, entirely between you and me, and for my own private reckoning, till your head governor has wore round a bit, and I can come alongside of him, is this.—Is everything right and comfortable here, and is Wal'r out'ard bound with a pretty fair wind?"

"What do you think now, Captain Cuttle?" returned Carker, gathering up his skirts and settling himself in his position. "You are a practical man: what do you think?"

The acuteness and significance of the captain's eye, as he cocked it in reply, no words short of those unutterable Chinese words before referred to could describe.

"Come!" said the captain, unspeakably encouraged, "what do you say? Am I right or wrong?"

So much had the captain expressed in his eye, emboldened and incited by Mr. Carker's smiling urbanity, that he felt himself in as fair a condition to put the question as if he had expressed his sentiments with the utmost elaboration.

"Right," said Mr. Carker, "I have no doubt."

"Out'ard bound, with fair weather, then, I say," cried Captain Cuttle.

Mr. Carker smiled assent.

"Wind right astarn, and plenty of it," pursued the captain.

Mr. Carker smiled assent again.

"Ay, ay!" said Captain Cuttle, greatly relieved and pleased. "I knowed how she headed, well enough; I told Wal'r so. Thankee, thankee."

"Gay has brilliant prospects," observed Mr. Carker, stretching his mouth wider yet; "all the world before him."

"All the world and his wife too, as the saying is," returned the delighted captain.

At the word "wife" (which he had uttered

without design), the captain stopped, cocked his eye again, and putting the glazed hat on the top of the knobby stick, gave it a twirl, and looked sideways at his always smiling friend.

"I'd bet a gill of old Jamaica," said the captain, eyeing him attentively, "that I know what you're smiling at."

Mr. Carker took his cue, and smiled the more.

"It goes no farther?" said the captain, making a poke at the door with the knobby stick to assure himself that it was shut.

"Not an inch," said Mr. Carker.

"You're a thinking of a capital F, perhaps," said the captain.

Mr. Carker didn't deny it.

"Anything about a L," said the captain, "or a O?"

Mr. Carker still smiled.

"Am I right again?" inquired the captain in a whisper, with the scarlet circle on his forehead swelling in his triumphant joy.

Mr. Carker, in reply, still smiling, and now nodding assent, Captain Cuttle rose and squeezed him by the hand, assuring him, warmly, that they were on the same tack, and that as for him (Cuttle), he had laid his course that way all along. "He knowed her first," said the captain, with all the secrecy and gravity that the subject demanded, "in an uncommon manner—you remember his finding her in the street, when she was a'most a babby—he has liked her ever since, and she him, as much as two such youngsters can. We've always said, Sol Gills and me, that they was cut out for each other."

A cat, or a monkey, or a hyena, or a death's head could not have shown the captain more teeth at one time than Mr. Carker showed him at this period of their interview.

"There's a general in-draught that way," observed the happy captain. "Wind and water sets in that direction, you see. Look at his being present t'other day!"

"Most favourable to his hopes," said Mr. Carker.

"Look at his being towed along in the wake of that day!" pursued the captain. "Why, what can cut him adrift now?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Carker.

"You're right again," returned the captain, giving his hand another squeeze. "Nothing it is. So! steady! There's a son gone: pretty little creetur! Ain't there?"

"Yes, there's a son gone," said the acquiescent Carker.

"Pass the word, and there's another ready for you," quoth the captain, "Nevy of a scien-

tific uncle! Nevv of Sol Gills! Wal'r! Wal'r, as is already in your business! And," said the captain, rising gradually to a quotation he was preparing for a final burst, "who—comes from Sol Gills's daily, to your business, and your buzzums."

The captain's complacency as he gently jogged Mr. Carker with his elbow, on concluding each of the foregoing short sentences, could be surpassed by nothing but the exultation with which he fell back and eyed him when he had finished this brilliant display of eloquence and sagacity; his great blue waistcoat heaving with the throes of such a masterpiece, and his nose in a state of violent inflammation from the same cause.

"Am I right?" said the captain.

"Captain Cuttle," said Mr. Carker, bending down at the knees, for a moment, in an odd manner, as if he were falling together to hug the whole of himself at once, "your views in reference to Walter Gay are thoroughly and accurately right. I understand that we speak together in confidence."

"Honour!" interposed the captain. "Not a word."

"To him or any one?" pursued the manager.

Captain Cuttle frowned and shook his head.

"But merely for your own satisfaction and guidance—and guidance, of course," repeated Mr. Carker, "with a view to your future proceedings."

"Thankee kindly, I am sure," said the captain, listening with great attention.

"I have no hesitation in saying, that's the fact. You have hit the probabilities exactly."

"And with regard to your head governor," said the captain, "why, an interview had better come about nat'ral between us. There's time enough."

Mr. Carker, with his mouth from ear to ear, repeated, "Time enough." Not articulating the words, but bowing his head affably, and forming them with his tongue and lips.

"And as I know now—it's what I always said—that Wal'r's in a way to make his fortune——" said the captain.

"To make his fortune," Mr. Carker repeated in the same dumb manner.

"—And as Wal'r's going on this little voyage is, as I may say, in his day's work, and a part of his general expectations here——" said the captain.

"Of his general expectations here," assented Mr. Carker, dumbly as before:

"—Why, so long as I know that," pursued the captain, "there's no hurry, and my mind's at ease."

Mr. Carker still blandly assenting in the same

voiceless manner, Captain Cuttle was strongly confirmed in his opinion that he was one of the most agreeable men he had ever met, and that even Mr. Dombey might improve himself on such a model. With great heartiness, therefore, the captain once again extended his enormous hand (not unlike an old block in colour), and gave him a grip that left upon his smoother flesh a proof impression of the chinks and crevices with which the captain's palm was liberally tattooed.

"Farewell!" said the captain. "I ain't a man of many words, but I take it very kind of you to be so friendly and above-board. You'll excuse me if I've been at all intruding, will you?" said the captain.

"Not at all," returned the other.

"Thank'ee. My berth ain't very roomy," said the captain, turning back again, "but it's tolerably snug; and if you was to find yourself near Brig Place, number nine, at any time—will you make a note of it?—and would come up-stairs, without minding what was said by the person at the door, I should be proud to see you."

With that hospitable invitation, the captain said "Good day!" and walked out and shut the door; leaving Mr. Carker still reclining against the chimney-piece. In whose sly look and watchful manner; in whose false mouth, stretched, but not laughing; in whose spotless cravat and very whiskers: even in whose silent passing of his soft hand over his white linen and his smooth face; there was something desperately cat-like.

The unconscious captain walked out in a state of self-glorification that imparted quite a new cut to the broad blue suit. "Stand by, Ned!" said the captain to himself. "You've done a little business for the youngsters to-day, my lad!"

In his exultation, and in his familiarity, present and prospective, with the House, the captain, when he reached the outer office, could not refrain from rallying Mr. Perch a little, and asking him whether he thought everybody was still engaged. But not to be bitter on a man who had done his duty, the captain whispered in his ear, that if he felt disposed for a glass of rum-and-water, and would follow, he would be happy to bestow the same upon him.

Before leaving the premises, the captain, somewhat to the astonishment of the clerks, looked round from a central point of view, and took a general survey of the office, as part and parcel of a project in which his young friend was nearly interested. The strong-room excited his especial admiration; but, that he might not appear too particular, he limited himself to an

approving glance, and, with a graceful recognition of the clerks as a body, that was full of politeness and patronage, passed out into the court. Being promptly joined by Mr. Perch, he conveyed that gentleman to the tavern, and fulfilled his pledge—hastily, for Perch's time was precious.

"I'll give you for a toast," said the captain, "Wal'r!"

"Who?" submitted Mr. Perch.

"Wal'r!" repeated the captain in a voice of thunder.

Mr. Perch, who seemed to remember having heard in infancy that there was once a poet of that name, made no objection; but he was much astonished at the captain's coming into the City to propose a poet; indeed, if he had proposed to put a poet's statue up—say Shakspeare's, for example—in a civic thoroughfare, he could hardly have done a greater outrage to Mr. Perch's experience. On the whole, he was such a mysterious and incomprehensible character, that Mr. Perch decided not to mention him to Mrs. Perch at all, in case of giving rise to any disagreeable consequences.

Mysterious and incomprehensible, the captain, with that lively sense upon him of having done a little business for the youngsters, remained all day, even to his most intimate friends; and but that Walter attributed his winks and grins, and other such pantomimic reliefs of himself, to his satisfaction in the success of their innocent deception upon old Sol Gills, he would assuredly have betrayed himself before night. As it was, however, he kept his own secret; and went home late from the instrument-maker's house, wearing the glazed hat so much on one side, and carrying such a beaming expression in his eyes, that Mrs. MacStinger (who might have been brought up at Doctor Blimber's, she was such a Roman matron) fortified herself, at the first glimpse of him, behind the open street-door, and refused to come out to the contemplation of her blessed infants until he was securely lodged in his own room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THERE is a hush through Mr. Dombey's house. Servants gliding up and down stairs rustle, but make no sound of footsteps. They talk together constantly, and sit long at meals, making much of their meat and drink, and enjoying themselves after a grim,

unholy fashion. Mrs. Wickam, with her eyes suffused with tears, relates melancholy anecdotes; and tells them how she always said at Mrs. Pipchin's that it would be so, and takes more table ale than usual, and is very sorry, but sociable. Cook's state of mind is similar. She promises a little fry for supper, and struggles about equally against her feelings and the onions.

Towlinson begins to think there's a fate in it, and wants to know if anybody can tell him of any good that ever came of living in a corner house. It seems to all of them as having happened a long time ago; though yet the child lies, calm and beautiful, upon his little bed.

After dark there come some visitors—noiseless visitors, with shoes of felt—who have been there before; and with them comes that bed of rest which is so strange a one for infant sleepers. All this time, the bereaved father has not been seen even by his attendant; for he sits in a corner of his own dark room when any one is there, and never seems to move at other times, except to pace it to and fro. But in the morning it is whispered among the household that he was heard to go up-stairs in the dead night, and that he stayed there—in the room—until the sun was shining.

At the offices in the City, the ground-glass windows are made more dim by shutters; and while the lighted lamps upon the desks are half extinguished by the day that wanders in, the day is half extinguished by the lamps, and an unusual gloom prevails. There is not much business done. The clerks are indisposed to work; and they make assignments to eat chops in the afternoon, and go up the river. Perch, the messenger, stays long upon his errands; and finds himself in bars of public-houses, invited thither by friends, and holding forth on the uncertainty of human affairs. He goes home to Balls Pond earlier in the evening than usual, and treats Mrs. Perch to a veal cutlet and Scotch ale. Mr. Carker the manager treats no one; neither is he treated; but alone in his own room he shows his teeth all day; and it would seem that there is something gone from Mr. Carker's path—some obstacle removed—which clears his way before him.

Now the rosy children living opposite to Mr. Dombey's house peep from their nursery windows down into the street; for there are four black horses at his door, with feathers on their heads; and feathers tremble on the carriage that they draw; and these, and an array of men with scarfs and staves, attract a crowd. The juggler, who was going to twirl the basin, puts his loose

coat on again over his fine dress; and his trudging wife, one-sided with her heavy baby in her arms, loiters to see the company come out. But closer to her dingy breast she presses her baby, when the burden that is so easily carried is borne forth; and the youngest of the rosy children at the high window opposite needs no restraining hand to check her in her glee, when, pointing with her dimpled finger, she looks into her nurse's face, and asks, "What's that?"

And now, among the knot of servants dressed in mourning, and the weeping women, Mr. Dombey passes through the hall to the other carriage that is waiting to receive him. He is not "brought down," these observers think, by sorrow and distress of mind. His walk is as erect, his bearing is as stiff, as ever it has been. He hides his face behind no handkerchief, and looks before him. But that his face is something sunk and rigid, and is pale, it bears the same expression as of old. He takes his place within the carriage, and three other gentlemen follow. Then the grand funeral moves slowly down the street. The feathers are yet nodding in the distance, when the juggler has the basin spinning on a cane, and has the same crowd to admire it. But the juggler's wife is less alert than usual with the money-box, for a child's burial has set her thinking that perhaps the baby underneath her shabby shawl may not grow up to be a man, and wear a sky-blue fillet round his head, and salmon-coloured worsted drawers, and tumble in the mud.

The feathers wind their gloomy way along the streets, and come within the sound of a church bell. In this same church the pretty boy received all that will soon be left of him on earth—a name. All of him that is dead they lay there, near the perishable substance of his mother. It is well. Their ashes lie where Florence in her walks—oh, lonely, lonely walks!—may pass them any day.

The service over, and the clergyman withdrawn, Mr. Dombey looks round, demanding, in a low voice, whether the person who has been requested to attend to receive instructions for the tablet is there?

Some one comes forward, and says "Yes."

Mr. Dombey intimates where he would have it placed; and shows him, with his hand upon the wall, the shape and size; and how it is to follow the memorial to the mother. Then, with his pencil, he writes out the inscription, and gives it to him: adding, "I wish to have it done at once."

"It shall be done immediately, sir."

"There is really nothing to inscribe but name and age, you see,"

The man bows, glancing at the paper, but appears to hesitate. Mr. Dombey, not observing his hesitation, turns away and leads towards the porch.

"I beg your pardon, sir;" a touch falls gently on his mourning cloak; "but as you wish it

done immediately, and it may be put in hand when I get back——"

"Well?"

"Will you be so good as read it over again? I think there's a mistake."

"Where?"



"ALL THIS TIME, THE BEREAVED FATHER HAS NOT BEEN SEEN EVEN BY HIS ATTENDANT; FOR HE SITS IN A CORNER OF HIS OWN DARK ROOM."

The statuary gives him back the paper, and points out, with his pocket rule, the words, "Beloved and only child."

"It should be 'son,' I think, sir?"

"You are right. Of course. Make the correction."

The father, with a hastier step, pursues his way to the coach. When the other three, who followed closely, take their seats, his face is hidden for the first time—shaded by his cloak. Nor do they see it any more that day. He alights first, and passes immediately into his

own room. The other mourners (who are only Mr. Chick, and two of the medical attendants) proceed up-stairs to the drawing-room, to be received by Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox. And what the face is, in the shut-up chamber underneath: or what the thoughts are: what the heart is, what the contest or the suffering: no one knows.

The chief thing that they know below-stairs, in the kitchen, is, that "it seems like Sunday." They can hardly persuade themselves but that there is something unbecoming, if not wicked, in the conduct of the people out of doors, who pursue their ordinary occupations, and wear their every-day attire. It is quite a novelty to have the blinds up, and the shutters open: and they make themselves dismally comfortable over bottles of wine, which are freely broached as on a festival. They are much inclined to moralise. Mr. Towlinson proposes with a sigh, "Amendment to us all!" for which, as cook says with another sigh, "There's room enough, God knows." In the evening, Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox take to needlework again. In the evening, also, Mr. Towlinson goes out to take the air, accompanied by the housemaid, who has not yet tried her mourning bonnet. They are very tender to each other at dusky street corners, and Towlinson has visions of leading an altered and blameless existence as a serious greengrocer in Oxford Market.

There is sounder sleep and deeper rest in Mr. Dombey's house to-night than there has been for many nights. The morning sun awakens the old household, settled down once more in their old ways. The rosy children opposite run past with hoops. There is a splendid wedding in the church. The juggler's wife is active with the money-box in another quarter of the town. The mason sings and whistles as he chips out P-A-U-L in the marble slab before him.

"And can it be that in a world so full and busy, the loss of one weak creature makes a void in any heart, so wide and deep that nothing but the width and depth of vast eternity can fill it up? Florence, in her innocent affliction, might have answered, "Oh, my brother, oh, my dearly-loved and loving brother! Only friend and companion of my slighted childhood! Could any less idea shed the light already dawning on your early grave, or give birth to the softened sorrow that is springing into life beneath this rain of tears?"

"My dear child," said Mrs. Chick, who held it as a duty incumbent on her to improve the occasion, "when you are as old as I am——"

"Which will be the prime of life," observed Miss Tox.

"—You will then," pursued Mrs. Chick, gently squeezing Miss Tox's hand in acknowledgment of her friendly remark, "you will then know that all grief is unavailing, and that it is our duty to submit."

"I will try, dear aunt. I do try," answered Florence, sobbing.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Chick, "because, my love, as our dear Miss Tox—of whose sound sense and excellent judgment there cannot possibly be two opinions——"

"My dear Louisa, I shall really be proud soon," said Miss Tox.

"—Will tell you, and confirm by her experience," pursued Mrs. Chick, "we are called upon on all occasions to make an effort. It is required of us. If any—— My dear," turning to Miss Tox, "I want a word. Mis—— Mis——"

"Demeanour?" suggested Miss Tox.

"No, no, no," said Mrs. Chick. "How can you? Goodness me, it's on the end of my tongue. Mis——"

"Placed affection?" suggested Miss Tox timidly.

"Good gracious, Lucretia!" returned Mrs. Chick. "How very monstrous! Misanthropy is the word I want. The idea! Misplaced affection! I say, if any misanthropy were to put, in my presence, the question, 'Why were we born?' I should reply, 'To make an effort.'"

"Very good indeed," said Miss Tox, much impressed by the originality of the sentiment. "Very good."

"Unhappily," pursued Mrs. Chick, "we have a warning under our own eyes. We have but too much reason to suppose, my dear child, that if an effort had been made in time, in this family, a train of the most trying and distressing circumstances might have been avoided. Nothing shall ever persuade me," observed the good matron with a resolute air, "but that, if that effort had been made by poor dear Fanny, the poor dear darling child would at least have had a stronger constitution."

Mrs. Chick abandoned herself to her feelings for half a moment; but, as a practical illustration of her doctrine, brought herself up short in the middle of a sob, and went on again.

"Therefore, Florence, pray let us see that you have some strength of mind, and do not selfishly aggravate the distress in which your poor papa is plunged."

"Dear aunt!" said Florence, kneeling quickly down before her, that she might the better and more earnestly look into her face. "Tell me more about papa. Pray tell me about him! Is he quite heart-broken?"

Miss Tox was of a tender nature, and there was something in this appeal that moved her very much. Whether she saw in it a succession, on the part of the neglected child, to the affectionate concern so often expressed by her dead brother—or a love that sought to twine itself about the heart that had loved him, and that could not bear to be shut out from sympathy with such a sorrow, in such sad community of love and grief—or whether she only recognised the earnest and devoted spirit which, although discarded and repulsed, was wrung with tenderness long unreturned, and in the waste and solitude of this bereavement cried to him to seek a comfort in it, and to give some, by some small response—whatever may have been her understanding of it, it moved Miss Tox. For the moment she forgot the majesty of Mrs. Chick, and, patting Florence hastily on the cheek, turned aside and suffered the tears to gush from her eyes, without waiting for a lead from that wise matron.

Mrs. Chick herself lost, for a moment, the presence of mind on which she so much prided herself; and remained mute, looking on the beautiful young face that had so long, so steadily, and patiently been turned towards the little bed. But recovering her voice—which was synonymous with her presence of mind; indeed, they were one and the same thing—she replied with dignity:

"Florence, my dear child, your poor papa is peculiar at times; and to question me about him is to question me upon a subject which I really do not pretend to understand. I believe I have as much influence with your papa as anybody has. Still, all I can say is, that he has said very little to me; and that I have only seen him once or twice for a minute at a time, and, indeed, have hardly seen him then, for his room has been dark. I have said to your papa, 'Paul!'—that is the exact expression I used—'Paul! why do you not take something stimulating?' Your papa's reply has always been, 'Louisa, have the goodness to leave me. I want nothing. I am better by myself.' If I was to be put upon my oath to-morrow, Lucretia, before a magistrate," said Mrs. Chick, "I have no doubt I could venture to swear to those identical words."

Miss Tox expressed her admiration by saying, 'My Louisa is ever methodical!'

"In short, Florence," resumed her aunt, 'literally nothing has passed between your poor papa and myself, until to-day; when I mentioned to your papa that Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles had written exceedingly kind notes—Our sweet boy! Lady Skettles

loved him like a—Where's my pocket-handkerchief?'

Miss Tox produced one.

"Exceedingly kind notes, proposing that you should visit them for change of scene. Mentioning to your papa that I thought Miss Tox and myself might now go home (in which he quite agreed), I inquired if he had any objection to your accepting this invitation. He said, 'No, Louisa, not the least!'

Florence raised her tearful eyes.

"At the same time, if you would prefer staying here, Florence, to paying this visit at present, or to going home with me—"

"I should much prefer it, aunt," was the faint rejoinder.

"Why then, child," said Mrs. Chick, "you can. It's a strange choice, I must say. But you always *were* strange. Anybody else at your time of life, and after what has passed—my dear Miss Tox, I have lost my pocket-handkerchief again—would be glad to leave here, one would suppose."

"I should not like to feel," said Florence, "as if the house was avoided. I should not like to think that the—his—the rooms up-stairs were quite empty and dreary, aunt. I would rather stay here for the present. Oh, my brother! oh, my brother!"

It was a natural emotion, not to be suppressed; and it would make way even between the fingers of the hands with which she covered up her face. The overcharged and heavy-laden breast must sometimes have that vent, or the poor wounded solitary heart within it would have fluttered like a bird with broken wings, and sunk down in the dust.

"Well, child!" said Mrs. Chick after a pause, "I wouldn't on any account say anything unkind to you, and that I'm sure you know. You will remain here, then, and do exactly as you like. No one will interfere with you, Florence, or wish to interfere with you, I'm sure."

Florence shook her head in sad assent.

"I had no sooner begun to advise your poor papa that he really ought to seek some distraction and restoration in a temporary change," said Mrs. Chick, "than he told me he had already formed the intention of going into the country for a short time. I'm sure I hope he'll go very soon. He can't go too soon. But I suppose there are some arrangements connected with his private papers, and so forth, consequent on the affliction that has tried us all so much—I can't think what's become of mine: Lucretia, lend me yours, my dear—that may occupy him for one or two evenings in his own room. Your

papa's a Dombey, child, if ever there was one," said Mrs. Chick, drying both her eyes at once with great care on opposite corners of Miss Tox's handkerchief. "He'll make an effort. There's no fear of him."

"Is there nothing, aunt," asked Florence, trembling, "I might do to—?"

"Lord, my dear child," interposed Mrs. Chick hastily, "what are you talking about? If your papa said to me—I have given you his exact words, 'Louisa, I want nothing; I am better by myself'—what do you think he'd say to you? You mustn't show yourself to him, child. Don't dream of such a thing."

"Aunt," said Florence, "I will go and lie down in my bed."

Mrs. Chick approved of this resolution, and dismissed her with a kiss. But Miss Tox, on a faint pretence of looking for the mislaid handkerchief, went up-stairs after her; and tried in a few stolen minutes to comfort her, in spite of great discouragement from Susan Nipper. For Miss Nipper, in her burning zeal, disparaged Miss Tox as a crocodile; yet her sympathy seemed genuine, and had at least the vantage-ground of disinterestedness—there was little favour to be won by it.

And, was there no one nearer and dearer than Susan to uphold the striving heart in its anguish? Was there no other neck to clasp; no other face to turn to? no one else to say a soothing word to such deep sorrow? Was Florence so alone in the bleak world that nothing else remained to her? Nothing. Stricken motherless and brotherless at once—for, in the loss of little Paul, that first and greatest loss fell heavily upon her—this was the only help she had. Oh, who can tell how much she needed help at first?

At first, when the house subsided into its accustomed course, and they had all gone away, except the servants, and her father shut up in his own rooms, Florence could do nothing but weep, and wander up and down, and sometimes, in a sudden pang of desolate remembrance, fly to her own chamber, wring her hands, lay her face down on her bed, and know no consolation: nothing but the bitterness and cruelty of grief. This commonly ensued upon the recognition of some spot or object very tenderly associated with him; and it made the miserable house, at first, a place of agony.

But it is not in the nature of pure love to burn so fiercely and unkindly long. The flame that in its grosser composition has the taint of earth, may prey upon the breast that gives it shelter; but the sacred fire from heaven is as gentle in the heart as when it rested on the heads of the

assembled twelve, and showed each man his brother, brightened and unhurt. The image conjured up, there soon returned the placid face, the softened voice, the loving looks, the quiet trustfulness and peace; and Florence, though she wept still, wept more tranquilly, and courted the remembrance.

It was not very long before the golden water, dancing on the wall, in the old place at the old serene time, had her calm eyes fixed upon it as it ebbed away. It was not very long before that room again knew her often; sitting there alone, as patient and as mild as when she had watched beside the little bed. When any sharp sense of its being empty smote upon her, she could kneel beside it, and pray God—it was the pouring out of her full heart—to let one angel love her and remember her.

It was not very long before, in the midst of the dismal house so wide and dreary, her low voice in the twilight, slowly, and stopping sometimes, touched the old air to which he had so often listened, with his drooping head upon her arm. And after that, and when it was quite dark, a little strain of music trembled in the room: so softly played and sung, that it was more like the mournful recollection of what she had done at his request, on that last night, than the reality repeated. But it was repeated, often—very often, in the shadowy solitude; and broken murmurs of the strain still trembled on the keys, when the sweet voice was hushed in tears.

Thus she gained heart to look upon the work with which her fingers had been busy by his side on the seashore; and thus it was not very long before she took to it again—with something of a human love for it, as if it had been sentient and had known him; and, sitting in a window, near her mother's picture, in the unused room so long deserted, wore away the thoughtful hours.

Why did the dark eyes turn so often from this work to where the rosy children lived? They were not immediately suggestive of her loss; for they were all girls; four little sisters. But they were motherless like her—and had a father.

It was easy to know when he had gone out and was expected home, for the elder child was always dressed and waiting for him at the drawing-room window, or in the balcony; and when he appeared, her expectant face lighted up with joy, while the others at the high window, and always on the watch too, clapped their hands, and drummed them on the sill, and called to him. The elder child would come down to the hall, and put her hand in his, and lead him up the stairs; and Florence would see her afterwards sitting by his side, or on his knee, or hanging

coaxingly about his neck and talking to him; and though they were always gay together, he would often watch her face, as if he thought her like her mother that was dead. Florence would sometimes look no more at this, and, bursting

into tears, would hide behind the curtain as if she were frightened, or would hurry from the window. Yet she could not help returning; and her work would soon fall unheeded from her hands again.



"IT WAS REPEATED, OFTEN—VERY OFTEN, IN THE SHADY SOLITUDE; AND BROKEN MURMURS OF THE STRAIN STILL TREMBLED ON THE KEYS, WHEN THE SWEET VOICE WAS HUSHED IN TEARS."

It was the house that had been empty, years ago. It had remained so for a long time. At last, and while she had been away from home, this family had taken it; and it was repaired and newly painted; and there were birds and flowers about it; and it looked very different from its

old self. But she never thought of the house. The children and their father were all in all.

When he had dined, she could see them, through the open windows, go down with their governess or nurse, and cluster round the table; and, in the still summer weather, the sound of

their childish voices and clear laughter would come ringing across the street, into the drooping air of the room in which she sat. Then they would climb and clamber up-stairs with him, and romp about him on the sofa, or group themselves at his knee, a very nosegay of little faces, while he seemed to tell them some story. Or they would come running out into the balcony; and then Florence would hide herself quickly, lest it should check them in their joy to see her in her black dress, sitting there alone.

The elder child remained with her father when the rest had gone away, and made his tea for him—happy little housekeeper she was then!—and sat conversing with him, sometimes at the window, sometimes in the room, until the candles came. He made her his companion, though she was some years younger than Florence; and she could be as staid and pleasantly demure, with her little book or workbox, as a woman. When they had candles, Florence from her own dark room was not afraid to look again. But when the time came for the child to say, "Good night, papa," and go to bed, Florence would sob and tremble as she raised her face to him, and could look no more.

Though still she would turn, again and again, before going to bed herself, from the simple air that had lulled him to rest so often, long ago, and from the other low, soft, broken strain of music, back to that house. But that she ever thought of it, or watched it, was a secret which she kept within her own young breast.

And did that breast of Florence—Florence, so ingenuous and true—so worthy of the love that he had borne her, and had whispered in his last faint words—whose guileless heart was mirrored in the beauty of her face, and breathed in every accent of her gentle voice—did that young breast hold any other secret? Yes. One more.

When no one in the house was stirring, and the lights were all extinguished, she would softly leave her own room, and with noiseless feet descend the staircase, and approach her father's door. Against it, scarcely breathing, she would rest her face and head, and press her lips, in the yearning of her love. She crouched upon the cold stone floor outside it, every night, to listen even for his breath; and in her one absorbing wish to be allowed to show him some affection, to be a consolation to him, to win him over to the endurance of some tenderness from her, his solitary child, she would have knelt down at his feet, if she had dared, in humble supplication.

No one knew it. No one thought of it. The door was ever closed, and he shut up within. He went out once or twice, and it was said in

the house that he was very soon going on his country journey; but he lived in those rooms, and lived alone, and never saw her, or inquired for her. Perhaps he did not even know that she was in the house.

One day, about a week after the funeral, Florence was sitting at her work, when Susan appeared, with a face half laughing and half crying, to announce a visitor.

"A visitor! To me, Susan!" said Florence, looking up in astonishment.

"Well, it *is* a wonder, ain't it, now, Miss Floy?" said Susan; "but I wish you had a many visitors, I do indeed, for you'd be all the better for it, and it's my opinion that the sooner you and me goes even to them old Skettleses, miss, the better for both. I may not wish to live in crowds, Miss Floy, but still I'm not a oyster."

To do Miss Nipper justice, she spoke more for her young mistress than herself; and her face showed it.

"But the visitor, Susan," said Florence.

Susan, with an hysterical explosion that was as much a laugh as a sob, and as much a sob as a laugh, answered,

"Mr. Toots!"

The smile that appeared on Florence's face passed from it in a moment, and her eyes filled with tears. But, at any rate, it was a smile, and that gave great satisfaction to Miss Nipper.

"My own feelings exactly, Miss Floy," said Susan, putting her apron to her eyes, and shaking her head. "Immediately I see that Innocent in the hall, Miss Floy, I burst out laughing first, and then I choked."

Susan Nipper involuntarily proceeded to do the like again on the spot. In the meantime, Mr. Toots, who had come up-stairs after her, all unconscious of the effect he produced, announced himself with his knuckles on the door, and walked in very briskly.

"How d'ye do, Miss Dombey?" said Mr. Toots. "I'm very well, I thank you; how are you?"

Mr. Toots—than whom there were few better fellows in the world, though there may have been one or two brighter spirits—had laboriously invented this long burst of discourse with the view of relieving the feelings both of Florence and himself. But finding that he had run through his property, as it were, in an injudicious manner, by squandering the whole before taking a chair, or before Florence had uttered a word, or before he had well got in at the door, he deemed it advisable to begin again.

"How d'ye do, Miss Dombey?" said Mr.

Toots. "I'm very well, I thank you; how are you?"

Florence gave him her hand, and said she was very well.

"I'm very well indeed," said Mr. Toots, taking a chair. "Very well indeed, I am." I don't remember," said Mr. Toots after reflecting a little, "that I was ever better, thank you."

"It's very kind of you to come," said Florence, taking up her work. "I am very glad to see you."

Mr. Toots responded with a chuckle. Thinking that might be too lively, he corrected it with a sigh. Thinking that might be too melancholy, he corrected it with a chuckle. Not thoroughly pleasing himself with either mode of reply, he breathed hard.

"You were very kind to my dear brother," said Florence, obeying her own natural impulse to relieve him by saying so. "He often talked to me about you."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," said Mr. Toots hastily. "Warm, ain't it?"

"It is beautiful weather," replied Florence.

"It agrees with me!" said Mr. Toots. "I don't think I ever was so well as I find myself at present, I'm obliged to you."

After stating this curious and unexpected fact, Mr. Toots fell into a deep well of silence.

"You have left Doctor Blimber's, I think?" said Florence, trying to help him out.

"I should hope so," returned Mr. Toots. And tumbled in again.

He remained at the bottom, apparently drowned, for at least ten minutes. At the expiration of that period, he suddenly floated, and said,

"Well! Good morning, Miss Dombey."

"Are you going?" asked Florence, rising.

"I don't know, though. No, not just at present," said Mr. Toots, sitting down again most unexpectedly. "The fact is—— I say, Miss Dombey!"

"Don't be afraid to speak to me," said Florence with a quiet smile; "I should be very glad if you would talk about my brother."

"Would you, though?" retorted Mr. Toots, with sympathy in every fibre of his otherwise expressionless face. "Poor Dombey! I'm sure I never thought that Burgess and Co.—fashionable tailors (but very dear), that we used to talk about—would make this suit of clothes for such a purpose." Mr. Toots was dressed in mourning. "Poor Dombey! I say! Miss Dombey!" blubbered Toots.

"Yes," said Florence.

"There's a friend he took to very much at

last. I thought you'd like to have him, perhaps, as a sort of keepsake. You remember his remembering Diogenes?"

"Oh yes! oh yes!" cried Florence.

"Poor Dombey! So do I," said Mr. Toots.

Mr. Toots, seeing Florence in tears, had great difficulty in getting beyond this point, and had nearly tumbled into the well again. But a chuckle saved him on the brink.

"I say," he proceeded, "Miss Dombey! I could have had him stolen for ten shillings, if they hadn't given him up: and I would: but they were glad to get rid of him, I think. If you'd like to have him, he's at the door. I brought him on purpose for you. He ain't a lady's dog, you know," said Mr. Toots, "but you won't mind that, will you?"

In fact, Diogenes was at that moment, as they presently ascertained from looking down into the street, staring through the window of a hackney cabriolet, into which, for conveyance to that spot, he had been ensnared, on a false pretence of rats among the straw. Sooth to say, he was as unlike a lady's dog as dog might be; and, in his gruff anxiety to get out, presented an appearance sufficiently unpromising, as he gave short yelps out of one side of his mouth, and overbalancing himself by the intensity of every one of those efforts, tumbled down into the straw, and then sprang panting up again, putting out his tongue, as if he had come express to a dispensary to be examined for his health.

But though Diogenes was as ridiculous a dog as one would meet with on a summer's day; a blundering, ill-favoured, clumsy, bullet-headed dog, continually acting on a wrong idea that there was an enemy in the neighbourhood, whom it was meritorious to bark at; and though he was far from good-tempered, and certainly was not clever, and had hair all over his eyes, and a comic nose, and an inconsistent tail, and a gruff voice; he was dearer to Florence, in virtue of that parting remembrance of him, and that request that he might be taken care of, than the most valuable and beautiful of his kind. So dear, indeed, was this same ugly Diogenes, and so welcome to her, that she took the jewelled hand of Mr. Toots, and kissed it in her gratitude. And when Diogenes, released, came tearing up the stairs and bouncing into the room (such a business as there was, first, to get him out of the cabriolet!), dived under all the furniture, and wound a long iron chain, that dangled from his neck, round legs of chairs and tables, and then tugged at it until his eyes became unnaturally visible, in consequence of their nearly starting out of his head; and when he growled

at Mr. Toots, who affected familiarity; and went pell-mell at Towlinson, morally convinced that he was the enemy whom he had barked at round the corner all his life, and had never seen yet; Florence was as pleased with him as if he had been a miracle of discretion.

Mr. Toots was so overjoyed by the success of his present, and was so delighted to see Florence bending down over Diogenes, smoothing his coarse back with her little delicate hand—Diogenes graciously allowing it from the first moment of their acquaintance—that he felt it difficult to take leave, and would, no doubt, have been a much longer time in making up his mind to do so, if he had not been assisted by Diogenes himself, who suddenly took it into his head to bay Mr. Toots, and to make short runs at him with his mouth open. Not exactly seeing his way to the end of these demonstrations, and sensible that they placed the pantaloon constructed by the art of Burgess and Co. in jeopardy, Mr. Toots, with chuckles, lapsed out at the door: by which, after looking in again two or three times, without any object at all, and being on each occasion greeted with a fresh run from Diogenes, he finally took himself off, and got away.

"Come, then, Di! Dear Di! Make friends with your new mistress. Let us love each other, Di!" said Florence, fondling his shaggy head. And Di, the rough and gruff, as if his hairy hide were perversive to the tear that dropped upon it, and his dog's heart melted as it fell, put his nose up to her face, and swore fidelity.

Diogenes the man did not speak plainer to Alexander the Great than Diogenes the dog spoke to Florence. He subscribed to the offer of his little mistress cheerfully, and devoted himself to her service. A banquet was immediately provided for him in a corner; and when he had eaten and drunk his fill, he went to the window where Florence was sitting looking on, rose up on his hind-legs, with his awkward fore-paws on her shoulders, licked her face and hands, nestled his great head against her heart, and wagged his tail till he was tired. Finally, Diogenes coiled himself up at her feet, and went to sleep.

Although Miss Nipper was nervous in regard of dogs, and felt it necessary to come into the room with her skirts carefully collected about her, as if she were crossing a brook on stepping-stones; also to utter little screams and stand up on chairs when Diogenes stretched himself; she was in her own manner affected by the kindness of Mr. Toots, and could not see Florence so alive to the attachment and society of this rude friend of little Paul's, without some mental com-

ments thereupon that brought the water to her eyes. Mr. Dombey, as a part of her reflections, may have been, in the association of ideas, connected with the dog; but, at any rate, after observing Diogenes and his mistress all the evening, and after exerting herself with much good-will to provide Diogenes a bed in an ante-chamber outside his mistress's door, she said hurriedly to Florence, before leaving her for the night:

"Your pa's a-going off, Miss Floy, to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning, Susan?"

"Yes, miss; that's the orders. Early."

"Do you know," asked Florence, without looking at her, "where papa is going, Susan?"

"Not exactly, miss. He's going to meet that precious major first, and I must say if I was acquainted with any major myself (which Heaven forbid), it shouldn't be a blue one!"

"Hush, Susan!" urged Florence gently.

"Well, Miss Floy," returned Miss Nipper, who was full of burning indignation, and minded her stops even less than usual, "I can't help it, blue he is, and while I was a Christian, although humble, I would have natural-coloured friends, or none."

It appeared, from what she added and had gleaned down-stairs, that Mrs. Chick had proposed the major for Mr. Dombey's companion, and that Mr. Dombey, after some hesitation, had invited him.

"Talk of *him* being a change indeed!" observed Miss Nipper to herself with boundless contempt. "If he's a change, give me a constancy."

"Good night, Susan," said Florence.

"Good night, my darling dear Miss Floy."

Her tone of commiseration smote the chord so often roughly touched, but never listened to while she or any one looked on. Florence, left alone, laid her head upon her hand, and pressing the other over her swelling heart, held free communication with her sorrows.

It was a wet night; and the melancholy rain fell pattering and dropping with a wearied sound. A sluggish wind was blowing, and went moaning round the house, as if it were in pain or grief. A shrill noise quivered through the trees. While she sat weeping, it grew late, and dreary midnight tolled out from the steeples.

Florence was little more than a child in years—not yet fourteen—and the loneliness and gloom of such an hour, in the great house where Death had lately made its own tremendous devastation, might have set an older fancy brooding on vague terrors. But her innocent imagination was too

full of one theme to admit them. Nothing wandered in her thoughts but love—a wandering love, indeed, and cast away—but turning always to her father.

There was nothing in the dropping of the rain, the moaning of the wind, the shuddering of the trees, the striking of the solemn clocks, that shook this one thought, or diminished its interest. Her recollections of the dear dead boy—and they were never absent—were itself; the same thing. And oh, to be shut out: to be so lost; never to have looked into her father's face, or touched him, since that hour!

She could not go to bed, poor child, and never had gone yet, since then, without making her nightly pilgrimage to his door. It would have been a strange, sad sight to see her now, stealing lightly down the stairs through the thick gloom, and stopping at it with a beating heart, and blinded eyes, and hair that fell down loosely and unthought of; and touching it outside with her wet cheek. But the night covered it, and no one knew.

The moment that she touched the door on this night, Florence found that it was open. For the first time it stood open, though by but a hair's breadth: and there was a light within. The first impulse of the timid child—and she yielded to it—was to retire swiftly. Her next, to go back, and to enter; and this second impulse held her in irresolution on the staircase.

In its standing open, even by so much as that chink, there seemed to be hope. There was encouragement in seeing a ray of light from within, stealing through the dark, stern doorway, and falling in a thread upon the marble floor. She turned back, hardly knowing what she did, but urged on by the love within her, and the trial they had undergone together, but not shared: and, with her hands a little raised and trembling, laid in.

Her father sat at his old table in the middle room. He had been arranging some papers, and destroying others, and the latter lay in fragile ruins before him. The rain dripped heavily upon the glass panes in the outer room, where he had so often watched poor Paul, a baby; and the low complainings of the wind were heard without.

But not by him. He sat with his eyes fixed on the table, so immersed in thought, that a far heavier tread than the light foot of his child could make might have failed to rouse him. His face was turned towards her. By the waning lamp, and at that haggard hour, it looked worn and dejected; and, in the utter loneliness sur-

rounding him, there was an appeal to Florence that struck home.

"Papa! papa! Speak to me, dear papa!"

He started at her voice, and leaped up from his seat. She was close before him with extended arms, but he fell back.

"What is the matter?" he said sternly. "Why do you come here? What has frightened you?"

If anything had frightened her, it was the face he turned upon her. The glowing love within the breast of his young daughter froze before it, and she stood and looked at him as if stricken into stone.

There was not one touch of tenderness or pity in it. There was not one gleam of interest, parental recognition, or relenting in it. There was a change in it, but not of that kind. The old indifference and cold constraint had given place to something: what, she never thought and did not dare to think, and yet she felt it in its force, and knew it well without a name: that as it looked upon her, seemed to cast a shadow on her head.

Did he see before him the successful rival of his son, in health and life? Did he look upon his own successful rival in that son's affection? Did a mad jealousy and withered pride poison sweet remembrances that should have endeared and made her precious to him? Could it be possible that it was gall to him to look upon her, in her beauty and her promise: thinking of his infant boy?

Florence had no such thoughts. But love is quick to know when it is spurned and hopeless: and hope died out of hers, as she stood looking in her father's face.

"I ask you, Florence, are you frightened? Is there anything the matter, that you come here?"

"I came, papa——"

"Against my wishes. Why?"

She saw he knew why: it was written broadly on his face: and dropped her head upon her hands with one prolonged low cry.

Let him remember it in that room, years to come. It has faded from the air before he breaks the silence. It may pass as quickly from his brain, as he believes, but it is there. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!

He took her by the arm. His hand was cold, and loose, and scarcely closed upon her.

"You are tired, I dare say," he said, taking up the light, and leading her towards the door, "and want rest. We all want rest. Go, Florence. You have been dreaming."

The dream she had had was over then, God

help her! and she felt that it could never more come back.

"I will remain here to light you up the stairs. The whole house is yours, above there," said her father slowly. "You are its mistress now. Good night!"

Still covering her face, she sobbed, and answered, "Good night, dear papa," and silently ascended. Once she looked back, as if she would have returned to him, but for fear. It was a momentary thought, too hopeless to encourage; and her father stood there with the light—hard, unresponsive, motionless—until the fluttering dress of his fair child was lost in the darkness.

Let him remember it in that room, years to come. The rain that falls upon the roof: the wind that mourns outside the door: may have foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!

The last time he had watched her, from the same place, winding up those stairs, she had had her brother in her arms. It did not move his heart towards her, now; it steeled it: but he went into his room, and locked his door, and sat down in his chair, and cried for his lost boy.

Diogenes was broad awake upon his post, and waiting for his little mistress.

"Oh, Di! Oh, dear Di! Love me for his sake!"

Diogenes already loved her for her own, and didn't care how much he showed it. So he made himself vastly ridiculous by performing a variety of uncouth bounces in the ante-chamber, and concluded, when poor Florence was at last asleep, and dreaming of the rosy children opposite, by scratching open her bedroom door: rolling up his bed into a pillow: lying down on the boards at the full length of his tether, with his head towards her: and looking lazily at her, upside down, out of the tops of his eyes, until, from winking and winking, he fell asleep himself, and dreamed, with gruff barks, of his enemy.

CHAPTER XIX.

WALTER GOES AWAY.

THE Wooden Midshipman at the instrument-maker's door, like the hard-hearted little midshipman he was, remained supremely indifferent to Walter's going away, even when the very last day of his sojourn in the back-parlour was on the decline. With his quadrant at his round black knob of an eye, and his figure in its old attitude of indomitable alacrity, the Midshipman displayed his elfin

small-clothes to the best advantage, and, absorbed in scientific pursuits, had no sympathy with worldly concerns. He was so far the creature of circumstances, that a dry day covered him with dust, and a misty day peppered him with little bits of soot; and a wet day brightened up his tarnished uniform for a moment, and a very hot day blistered him; but otherwise he was a callous, obdurate, conceited midshipman, intent on his own discoveries, and caring as little for what went on about him, terrestrially, as Archimedes at the taking of Syracuse.

Such a midshipman he seemed to be, at least, in the then position of domestic affairs. Walter eyed him kindly many a time in passing in and out; and poor old Sol, when Walter was not there; would come and lean against the door-post, resting his weary wig as near, the shoe-buckles of the guardian genius of his trade and shop as he could. But no fierce idol with a mouth from ear to ear, and a murderous visage made of parrots' feathers, was ever more indifferent to the appeals of its savage votaries than was the Midshipman to these marks of attachment.

Walter's heart felt heavy as he looked round his old bedroom, up among the parapets and chimney-pots, and thought that one more night already darkening would close his acquaintance with it, perhaps for ever. Dismantled of his little stock of books and pictures, it looked coldly and reproachfully on him for his desertion, and had already a foreshadowing upon it of its coming strangeness. "A few hours more," thought Walter, "and no dream I ever had here when I was a school-boy will be so little mine as this old room. The dream may come back in my sleep, and I may return waking to this place, it may be: but the dream at least will serve no other master, and the room may have a score, and every one of them may change, neglect, misuse it."

But his uncle was not to be left alone in the little back-parlour, where he was then sitting by himself; for Captain Cuttle, considerate in his roughness, stayed away against his will, purposely that they should have some talk together unobserved: so Walter, newly returned home from his last day's bustle, descended briskly to bear him company.

"Uncle," he said gaily, laying his hand upon the old man's shoulder, "what shall I send you home from Barbadoes?"

"Hope, my dear Wally. Hope that we shall meet again on this side of the grave. Send me as much of that as you can."

"So I will, uncle: I have enough and to

spare, and I'll not be chary of it! And as to lively turtles, and limes for Captain Cuttle's punch, and preserves for you on Sundays, and all that sort of thing, why, I'll send you ship-loads, uncle: when I'm rich enough."

Old Sol wiped his spectacles, and faintly smiled.

"That's right, uncle!" cried Walter merrily, and clapping him half-a-dozen times more upon the shoulder. "You cheer up me! I'll cheer up you! We'll be as gay as larks to-morrow morning, uncle, and we'll fly as high! As to my anticipations, they are singing out of sight now."

"Wally, my dear boy," returned the old man, "I'll do my best, I'll do my best."

"And your best, uncle," said Walter, with his pleasant laugh, "is the best best that I know. You'll not forget what you're to send me, uncle?"

"No, Wally, no," replied the old man; "everything I hear about Miss Dombey, now that she is left alone, poor lamb, I'll write. I fear it won't be much, though, Wally."

"Why, I'll tell you what, uncle," said Walter after a moment's hesitation; "I have just been up there."

"Ay, ay, ay?" murmured the old man, raising his eyebrows, and his spectacles with them.

"Not to see her," said Walter, "though I could have seen her, I dare say, if I had asked, Mr. Dombey being out of town: but to say a parting word to Susan. I thought I might venture to do that, you know, under the circumstances, and remembering when I saw Miss Dombey last."

"Yes, my boy, yes," replied his uncle, rousing himself from a temporary abstraction.

"So I saw her," pursued Walter. "Susan, I mean: and I told her I was off and away to-morrow. And I said, uncle, that you had always had an interest in Miss Dombey since that night when she was here, and always wished her well and happy, and always would be proud and glad to serve her in the least: I thought I might say that, you know, under the circumstances. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, my boy, yes," replied his uncle in the tone as before.

"And I added," pursued Walter, "that if she—Susan, I mean—could ever let you know, either through herself or Mrs. Richards, or anybody else who might be coming this way, that Miss Dombey was well and happy, you would take it very kindly, and would write so much to me, and I should take it very kindly too. There! Upon my word, uncle," said Walter, "I scarcely slept all last night through thinking of doing this; and

could not make up my mind, when I was out, whether to do it or not; and yet I am sure it is the true feeling of my heart, and I should have been quite miserable afterwards if I had not relieved it."

His honest voice and manner corroborated what he said, and quite established its ingenuousness.

"So, if you ever see her, uncle," said Walter, "I mean Miss Dombey now—and perhaps you may—who knows?—tell her how much I felt for her; how much I used to think of her when I was here; how I spoke of her, with the tears in my eyes, uncle, on this last night before I went away. Tell her that I said I never could forget her gentle manner, or her beautiful face, or her sweet kind disposition that was better than all. And as I didn't take them from a woman's feet, or a young lady's: only a little innocent child's," said Walter: "tell her, if you don't mind, uncle, that I kept those shoes—she'll remember how often they fell off, that night—and took them away with me as a remembrance!"

They were at that very moment going out at the door in one of Walter's trunks. A porter, carrying off his baggage on a truck for shipment at the docks on board the Son and Heir, had got possession of them: and wheeled them away, under the very eye of the insensible Midshipman, before their owner had well finished speaking.

But that ancient mariner might have been excused his insensibility to the treasure as it rolled away. For, under his eye at the same moment, accurately within his range of observation, coming full into the sphere of his startled and intensely wide-awake look-out, were Florence and Susan Nipper: Florence looking up into his face half timidly, and receiving the whole shock of his wooden ogling!

More than this, they passed into the shop; and passed in at the parlour door, before they were observed by anybody but the Midshipman. And Walter, having his back to the door, would have known nothing of their apparition even then, but for seeing his uncle spring out of his own chair, and nearly tumble over another.

"Why, uncle!" exclaimed Walter. "What's the matter?"

Old Solomon replied, "Miss Dombey!"

"Is it possible?" cried Walter, looking round and starting up in his turn. "Here!"

Why, it was so possible and so actual, that, while the words were on his lips, Florence hurried past him; took Uncle Sol's snuff-coloured lappels, one in each hand; kissed him on the cheek; and turning, gave her hand to Walter

with a simple truth and earnestness that was her own, and no one else's in the world!

"Going away, Walter!" said Florence.

"Yes, Miss Dombey," he replied, but not so hopefully as he endeavoured; "I have a voyage before me."

"And your uncle," said Florence, looking back at Solomon. "He is sorry you are going, I am sure. Ah! I see he is! Dear Walter; I am very sorry too."

"Goodness knows," exclaimed Miss Nipper, "there's a many we could spare instead, if numbers is a object, Mrs. Pipchin as a overseer would come cheap at her weight in gold, and if a knowledge of black slavery should be required, them Blimbers is the very people for the situation."

With that Miss Nipper untied her bonnet strings, and, after looking vacantly for some moments into a little black teapot that was set forth with the usual homely service on the table, shook her head and a tin canister, and began unasked to make the tea.

In the meantime Florence had turned again to the instrument-maker, who was as full of admiration as surprise. "So grown!" said old Sol. "So improved! And yet not altered! Just the same!"

"Indeed!" said Florence.

"Ye—yes," returned old Sol, rubbing his hands slowly, and considering the matter half aloud, as something pensive in the bright eyes looking at him arrested his attention, "Yes, that expression was in the younger face too!"

"You remember me," said Florence, with a smile, "and what a little creature I was then?"

"My dear young lady," returned the instrument-maker, "how could I forget you, often as I have thought of you and heard of you since? At the very moment, indeed, when you came in, Wally was talking about you to me, and leaving messages for you, and—"

"Was he?" said Florence. "Thank you, Walter! Oh, thank you, Walter! I was afraid you might be going away, and hardly thinking of me;" and again she gave him her little hand so freely and so faithfully, that Walter held it for some moments in his own, and could not bear to let it go.

Yet Walter did not hold it as he might have held it once, nor did its touch awaken those old day-dreams of his boyhood that had floated past him sometimes even lately, and confused him with their indistinct and broken shapes. The purity and innocence of her endearing manner, and its perfect trustfulness, and the undisguised regard for him that lay so deeply seated in her

constant eyes, and glowed upon her fair face through the smile that shaded—for, alas! it was a smile too sad to brighten—it, were not of their romantic race. They brought back to his thoughts the early death-bed he had seen her tending, and the love the child had borne her; and on the wings of such remembrances she seemed to rise up, far above his idle fancies, into clearer and serener air.

"I—I am afraid I must call you Walter's uncle, sir," said Florence to the old man, "if you'll let me."

"My dear young lady!" cried old Sol. "Let you! Good gracious!"

"We always knew you by that name, and talked of you," said Florence, glancing round, and sighing gently. "The nice old parlour! Just the same! How well I recollect it!"

Old Sol looked first at her, then at his nephew, and then rubbed his hands, and rubbed his spectacles, and said below his breath, "Ah! time, time, time!"

There was a short silence; during which Susan Nipper skilfully impounded two extra cups and saucers from the cupboard, and awaited the drawing of the tea with a thoughtful air.

"I want to tell Walter's uncle," said Florence, laying her hand timidly upon the old man's, as it rested on the table, to bespeak his attention, "something that I am anxious about. He is going to be left alone, and if he will allow me—not to take Walter's place, for that I couldn't do, but to be his true friend, and help him, if I ever can, while Walter is away, I shall be very much obliged to him indeed. Will you? May I, Walter's uncle?"

The instrument-maker, without speaking, put her hand to his lips, and Susan Nipper, leaning back with her arms crossed in the chair of presidency into which she had voted herself, bit one end of her bonnet strings, and heaved a gentle sigh as she looked up at the sky-light.

"You will let me come to see you," said Florence, "when I can, and you will tell me everything about yourself and Walter; and you will have no secrets from Susan when she comes and I do not, but will confide in us, and trust us, and rely upon us. And you'll try to let us be a comfort to you? Will you, Walter's uncle?"

The sweet face looking into his, the gently-pleading eyes; the soft voice, and the light touch on his arm, made the more winning by a child's respect and honour for his age, that gave to all an air of graceful doubt and modest hesitation—these, and her natural earnestness, so overcame the poor old instrument-maker, that he only answered:

"Wally, say a word for me, my dear. I'm very grateful."

"No, Walter," returned Florence with her quiet smile. "Say nothing for him, if you please. I understand him very well, and we

must learn to talk together without you, dear Walter."

The regretful tone in which she said these latter words touched Walter more than all the rest.



"TOOK UNCLE SOL'S SNUFF-COLOURED LAPPELS, ONE IN EACH HAND; KISSED HIM ON THE CHEEK," ETC.

"Miss Florence," he replied, with an effort to recover the cheerful manner he had preserved while talking with his uncle, "I know no more than my uncle what to say in acknowledgment of such kindness, I am sure. But what could I say, after all, if I had the power of talking for an hour, except that it is like you?"

Susan Nipper began upon a new part of her bonnet string, and nodded at the sky-light, in approval of the sentiment expressed.

"Oh! but, Walter," said Florence, "there is something that I wish to say to you before you go away, and you must call me Florence, if you please, and not speak like a stranger."

"Like a stranger!" returned Walter. "No; I couldn't speak so. I am sure, at least, I couldn't feel like one."

"Ay, but that is not enough, and is not what I mean. For Walter," added Florence, bursting into tears, "he liked you very much, and said before he died that he was fond of you, and said 'Remember Walter!' and if you'll be a brother to me, Walter, now that he is gone and I have none on earth, I'll be your sister all my life, and think of you like one, wherever we may be! This is what I wished to say, dear Walter, but I cannot say it as I would, because my heart is full."

And, in its fulness and its sweet simplicity, she held out both her hands to him. Walter, taking them, stooped down and touched the tearful face that neither shrunk nor turned away, nor reddened as he did so, but looked up at him with confidence and truth. In that one moment every shadow of doubt or agitation passed away from Walter's soul. It seemed to him that he responded to her innocent appeal, beside the dead child's bed: and, in the solemn presence he had seen there, pledged himself to cherish and protect her very image, in his banishment, with brotherly regard; to garner up her simple faith inviolate; and hold himself degraded if he breathed upon it any thought that was not in her own breast when she gave it to him.

Susan Nipper, who had bitten both her bonnet strings at once, and imparted a great deal of private emotion to the sky-light, during this transaction, now changed the subject by inquiring who took milk and who took sugar; and, being enlightened on these points, poured out the tea. They all four gathered socially about the little table, and took tea under that young lady's active superintendence; and the presence of Florence in the back-parlour brightened the Tartar frigate on the wall.

Half an hour ago, Walter, for his life, would have hardly called her by her name. But he could do so now when she entreated him.. He could think of her being there, without a lurking misgiving that it would have been better if she had not come. He could calmly think how beautiful she was, how full of promise, what a home some happy man would find in such a heart one day. He could reflect upon his own place in that heart with pride; and, with a brave determination, if not to deserve it—he still thought that far above him—never to deserve it less.

Some fairy influence must surely have hovered round the hands of Susan Nipper when she

made the tea, engendering the tranquil air that reigned in the back-parlour during its discussion. Some counter-influence must surely have hovered round the hands of Uncle Sol's chronometer, and moved them faster than the Tartar frigate ever went before the wind. Be this as it may, the visitors had a coach in waiting at a quiet corner not far off; and the chronometer, on being incidentally referred to, gave such a positive opinion that it had been waiting a long time, that it was impossible to doubt the fact, especially when stated on such unimpeachable authority. If Uncle Sol had been going to be hanged by his own time, he never would have allowed that the chronometer was too fast by the least fraction of a second.

Florence, at parting, recapitulated to the old man all that she had said before, and bound him to their compact. Uncle Sol attended her lovingly to the legs of the Wooden Midshipman, and there resigned her to Walter, who was ready to escort her and Susan Nipper to the coach.

"Walter," said Florence by the way, "I have been afraid to ask before your uncle. Do you think you will be absent very long?"

"Indeed," said Walter, "I don't know. I fear so. Mr. Dombey signified as much, I thought, when he appointed me."

"Is it a favour, Walter?" inquired Florence after a moment's hesitation, and looking anxiously in his face.

"The appointment?" returned Walter.

"Yes."

Walter would have given anything to have answered in the affirmative, but his face answered before his lips could, and Florence was too attentive to it not to understand its reply.

"I am afraid you have scarcely been a favourite with papa," she said timidly.

"There is no reason," replied Walter, smiling, "why I should be."

"No reason, Walter!"

"There was no reason," said Walter, understanding what she meant. "There are many people employed in the House. Between Mr. Dombey and a young man like me there's a wide space of separation. If I do my duty, I do what I ought, and do no more than all the rest."

Had Florence any misgiving of which she was hardly conscious: any misgiving that had sprung into an indistinct and undefined existence since that recent night when she had gone down to her father's room: that Walter's accidental interest in her, and early knowledge of her, might have involved him in that powerful displeasure and dislike? Had Walter any such idea, or any

sudden thought that it was in her mind at that moment? Neither of them hinted at it. Neither of them spoke at all for some short time. Susan, walking on the other side of Walter, eyed them both sharply; and certainly Miss Nipper's thoughts travelled in that direction, and very confidently too.

"You may come back very soon," said Florence, "perhaps, Walter."

"I *may* come back," said Walter, "an old man, and find you an old lady. But I hope for better things."

"Papa," said Florence after a moment, "will—will recover from his grief, and—speak more freely to me one day, perhaps; and if he should, I will tell him how much I wish to see you back again, and ask him to recall you for my sake."

There was a touching modulation in these words about her father that Walter understood too well.

The coach being close at hand, he would have left her without speaking, for now he felt what parting was; but Florence held his hand when she was seated, and then he found there was a little packet in her own.

"Walter," she said, looking full upon him with her affectionate eyes, "like you, I hope for better things. I will pray for them, and believe that they will arrive. I made this little gift for Paul. Pray take it, with my love, and do not look at it until you are gone away. And now, God bless you, Walter! Never forget me. You are my brother, dear!"

He was glad that Susan Nipper came between them, or he might have left her with a sorrowful remembrance of him. He was glad, too, that she did not look out of the coach again, but waved the little hand to him instead, as long as he could see it.

In spite of her request, he could not help opening the packet that night when he went to bed. It was a little purse: and there was money in it.

Bright rose the sun next morning, from his absence in strange countries, and up rose Walter with it to receive the captain, who was already at the door: having turned out earlier than was necessary, in order to get under way while Mrs. MacStinger was yet slumbering. The captain pretended to be in tiptop spirits, and brought a very smoky tongue in one of the pockets of the broad blue coat for breakfast.

"And, Wal'r," said the captain when they took their seats at table, "if your uncle's the man I think him, he'll bring out the last bottle of the madeira on the present occasion."

"No, no, Ned," returned the old man. "No!

That shall be opened when Walter comes home again."

"Well said!" cried the captain. "Hear him!"

"There it lies," said Sol Gills, "down in the little cellar, covered with dirt and cobwebs. There may be dirt and cobwebs over you and me, perhaps, Ned, before it sees the light."

"Hear him!" cried the captain. "Good morality! Wal'r, my lad. Train up a fig-tree in the way it should go, and when you are old sit under the shade on it. Overhaul the—Well," said the captain on second thoughts, "I an't quite certain where that's to be found; but when found, make a note of. Sol Gills, heave ahead again!"

"But there, or somewhere it shall lie, Ned, until Wally comes back to claim it," said the old man. "That's all I meant to say."

"And well said too," returned the captain; "and if we three don't crack that bottle in company, I'll give you two leave to drink my allowance!"

Notwithstanding the captain's excessive joviality, he made but a poor hand at the smoky tongue, though he tried very hard, when anybody looked at him, to appear as if he were eating with a vast appetite. He was terribly afraid, likewise, of being left alone with either uncle or nephew; appearing to consider that his only chance of safety, as to keeping up appearances, was in there being always three together. This terror on the part of the captain reduced him to such ingenious evasions as running to the door when Solomon went to put his coat on, under pretence of having seen an extraordinary hackney coach pass: and darting out into the road when Walter went up-stairs to take leave of the lodgers, on a feint of smelling fire in a neighbouring chimney. These artifices Captain Cuttle deemed inscrutable by any uninspired observer.

Walter was coming down from his parting expedition up-stairs, and was crossing the shop to go back to the little parlour, when he saw a faded face he knew, looking in at the door, and darted towards it.

"Mr. Carker!" cried Walter, pressing the hand of John Carker the junior. "Pray come in! This is kind of you, to be here so early to say good-bye to me. You knew how glad it would make me to shake hands with you once before going away. I cannot say how glad I am to have this opportunity. Pray come in."

"It is not likely that we may ever meet again, Walter," returned the other, gently resisting his invitation, "and I am glad of this opportunity.

too. I may venture to speak to you, and to take you by the hand, on the eve of separation. I shall not have to resist your frank approaches, Walter, any more."

There was a melancholy in his smile, as he said it, that showed he had found some company and friendship for his thoughts even in that.

"Ah, Mr. Carker!" returned Walter. "Why did you resist them? You could have done me nothing but good, I am very sure."

He shook his head. "If there were any good," he said, "I could do on this earth, I would do it, Walter, for you. The sight of you from day to day has been at once happiness and remorse to me. But the pleasure has outweighed the pain. I know that, now, by knowing what I lose."

"Come in, Mr. Carker, and make acquaintance with my good old uncle," urged Walter. "I have often talked to him about you, and he will be glad to tell you all he hears from me. I have not," said Walter, noticing his hesitation, and speaking with embarrassment himself. "I have not told him anything about our last conversation, Mr. Carker; not even him, believe me."

The grey junior pressed his hand, and tears rose in his eyes.

"If I ever make acquaintance with him, Walter," he returned, "it will be that I may hear tidings of you. Rely on my not wronging your forbearance and consideration. It would be to wrong it, not to tell him all the truth before I sought a word of confidence from him. But I have no friend or acquaintance except you: and even for your sake am little likely to make any."

"I wish," said Walter, "you had suffered me to be your friend indeed. I always wished it, Mr. Carker, as you know; but never half so much as now, when we are going to part."

"It is enough," replied the other, "that you have been the friend of my own breast, and that when I have avoided you most, my heart inclined the most towards you, and was fullest of you. Walter, good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Carker. Heaven be with you, sir!" cried Walter with emotion.

"If," said the other, retaining his hand while he spoke; "if, when you come back, you miss me from my old corner, and should hear from any one where I am lying, come and look upon my grave. Think that I might have been as honest and as happy as you! And let me think, when I know my time is coming on, that some one like my former self may stand there, for a moment, and remember me with pity and forgiveness! Walter, good-bye!"

His figure crept like a shadow down the bright, sun-lighted street, so cheerful, yet so solemn, in the early summer morning; and slowly passed away.

The relentless chronometer at last announced that Walter must turn his back upon the Wooden Midshipman: and away they went, himself, his uncle, and the captain, in a hackney coach, to a wharf, where they were to take steamboat for some reach down the river, the name of which, as the captain gave it out, was a hopeless mystery to the ears of landsmen. Arrived at this Reach (whither the ship had repaired by last night's tide), they were boarded by various excited watermen, and among others by a dirty Cyclops of the captain's acquaintance, who, with his one eye, had made the captain out some mile and a half off, and had been exchanging unintelligible roars with him ever since. Becoming the lawful prize of this personage, who was frightfully hoarse and constitutionally in want of shaving, they were all three put aboard the Son and Heir. And the Son and Heir was in a pretty state of confusion, with sails lying all bedraggled on the wet decks, loose ropes tripping people up, men in red shirts running barefoot to and fro, casks blocking every foot of space, and, in the thickest of the fray, a black cook in a black caboose up to his eyes in vegetables, and blinded with smoke.

The captain immediately drew Walter into a corner, and with a great effort, that made his face very red, pulled up the silver watch, which was so big, and so tight in his pocket, that it came out like a bung.

"Wal''," said the captain, handing it over, and shaking him heartily by the hand, "a parting gift, my lad. Put it back half an hour every morning, and about another quarter towards the afternoon, and it's a watch that'll do you credit."

"Captain Cuttle! I couldn't think of it!" cried Walter, detaining him, for he was running away. "Pray take it back. I have one already."

"Then, Wal''," said the captain, suddenly diving into one of his pockets, and bringing up the two tea-spoons and the sugar-tongs, with which he had armed himself to meet such an objection, "take this here trifle of plate instead."

"No, no, I couldn't indeed!" cried Walter. "A thousand thanks! Don't throw them away, Captain Cuttle!" for the captain was about to jerk them overboard. "They'll be of much more use to you than me. Give me your stick. I have often thought that I should like to have it. There! Good-bye, Captain Cuttle! Take care of my uncle! Uncle Sol, God bless you!"

They were over the side in the confusion,

before Walter caught another glimpse of either ; and when he ran up to the stern, and looked after them, he saw his uncle hanging down his head in the boat, and Captain Cuttle rapping him on the back with the great silver watch (it must have been very painful), and gesticulating hopefully with the tea-spoons and sugar-tongs. Catching sight of Walter, Captain Cuttle dropped the property into the bottom of the boat with perfect unconcern, being evidently oblivious of its existence, and pulling off the glazed hat, hailed him lustily. The glazed hat made quite a show in the sun with its glistening, and the captain continued to wave it until he could be seen no longer. Then the confusion on board, which had been rapidly increasing, reached its height ; two or three other boats went away with a cheer ; the sails shone bright and full above, as Walter watched them spread their surface to the favourable breeze ; the water flew in sparkles from the prow ; and off upon her voyage went the Son and Heir, as hopefully and trippingly as many another son and heir, gone down, had started on his way before her.

Day after day, old Sol and Captain Cuttle kept her reckoning in the little back-parlour, and worked out her course with the chart spread before them on the round table. At night, when old Sol climbed up-stairs, so lonely, to the attic where it sometimes blew great guns, he looked up at the stars and listened to the wind, and kept a longer watch than would have fallen to his lot on board the ship. The last bottle of the old madeira, which had had its cruising days, and known its dangers of the deep, lay silently beneath its dust and cobwebs, in the meanwhile, undisturbed.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. DOMBEY GOES UPON A JOURNEY.

MR. DOMBEY, sir," said Major Bagstock, "Joey B. is not in general a man of sentiment, for Joseph is tough. But Joe has his feelings, sir, and when they *are* awakened—
"Damme, Mr. Dombey," cried the major with sudden ferocity, "this is weakness, and I won't submit to it!"

Major Bagstock delivered himself of these expressions on receiving Mr. Dombey as his guest at the head of his own staircase in Princess's Place. Mr. Dombey had come to break-

fast with the major, previous to their setting forth on their trip ; and the ill-starred native had already undergone a world of misery arising out of the muffins, while, in connection with the general question of boiled eggs, life was a burden to him.

"It is not for an old soldier of the Bagstock breed," observed the major, relapsing into a mild state, "to deliver himself up, a prey to his own emotions ; but—damme, sir," cried the major in another spasm of ferocity, "I condole with you!"

The major's purple visage deepened in its hue, and the major's lobster eyes stood out in bolder relief, as he shook Mr. Dombey by the hand, imparting to that peaceful action as defiant a character as if it had been the prelude to his immediately boxing Mr. Dombey for a thousand pounds a side and the championship of England. With a rotatory motion of his head, and a wheeze very like the cough of a horse, the major then conducted his visitor to the sitting-room, and there welcomed him (having now composed his feelings) with the freedom and frankness of a travelling companion.

"Dombey," said the major, "I'm glad to see you. I'm proud to see you. There are not many men in Europe to whom J. Bagstock would say that—for Josh is blunt, sir : it's his nature—but Joey B. is proud to see you, Dombey."

"Major," returned Mr. Dombey, "you are very obliging."

"No, sir," said the major. "Devil a bit ! That's not my character. If that had been Joe's character, Joe might have been, by this time, Lieutenant-General Sir Joseph Bagstock, K.C.B., and might have received you in very different quarters. You don't know old Joe yet, I find. But this occasion, being special, is a source of pride to me. By the Lord, sir," said the major resolutely, "it's an honour to me!"

Mr. Dombey, in his estimation of himself and his money, felt that this was very true, and therefore did not dispute the point. But the instinctive recognition of such a truth by the major, and his plain avowal of it, were very agreeable. It was a confirmation to Mr. Dombey, if he had required any, of his not being mistaken in the major. It was an assurance to him that his power extended beyond his own immediate sphere ; and that the major, as an officer and a gentleman, had a no less becoming sense of it than the beadle of the Royal Exchange.

And if it were ever consolatory to know this, or the like of this, it was consolatory then, when the impotence of his will, the instability of his hopes, the feebleness of wealth, had been so direfully impressed upon him. What could it

do? his boy had asked him. Sometimes, thinking of the baby question, he could hardly forbear inquiring himself, what *could* it do indeed: what had it done?

But these were lonely thoughts, bred late at night in the sullen despondency and gloom of his retirement, and pride easily found its reassurance in many testimonies to the truth, as unimpeachable and precious as the major's. Mr. Dombey, in his friendlessness, inclined to the major. It cannot be said that he warmed towards him, but he thawed a little. The major had had some part—and not too much—in the days by the seaside. He was a man of the world, and knew some great people. He talked much, and told stories; and Mr. Dombey was disposed to regard him as a choice spirit who shone in society, and who had not that poisonous ingredient of poverty with which choice spirits in general are too much adulterated. His station was undeniable. Altogether the major was a creditable companion, well accustomed to a life of leisure, and to such places as that they were about to visit, and having an air of gentlemanly ease about him that mixed well enough with his own City character, and did not compete with it at all. If Mr. Dombey had any lingering idea that the major, as a man accustomed, in the way of his calling, to make light of the ruthless hand that had lately crushed his hopes, might unconsciously impart some useful philosophy to him, and scare away his weak regrets, he hid it from himself, and left it lying at the bottom of his pride, unexamined.

"Where is my scoundrel?" said the major, looking wrathfully round the room.

The native, who had no particular name, but answered to any vituperative epithet, presented himself instantly at the door, and ventured to come no nearer.

"You villain!" said the choleric major, "where's the breakfast?"

The dark servant disappeared in search of it, and was quickly heard reascending the stairs in such a tremulous state, that the plates and dishes on the tray he carried, trembling sympathetically as he came, rattled again all the way up.

"Dombey," said the major, glancing at the native as he arranged the table, and encouraging him with an awful shake of his fist when he upset a spoon, "here is a devilled grill, a savoury pie, a dish of kidneys, and so forth. Pray sit down. Old Joe can give you nothing but camp fare, you see."

"Very excellent fare, major," replied his guest; and not in mere politeness either; for the major always took the best possible care of himself,

and, indeed, ate rather more of rich meats than was good for him, insomuch that his Imperial complexion was mainly referred by the faculty to that circumstance.

"You have been looking over the way, sir," observed the major. "Have you seen our friend?"

"You mean Miss Tox," retorted Mr. Dombey. "No."

"Charming woman, sir," said the major, with a fat laugh rising in his short throat, and nearly suffocating him.

"Miss Tox is a very good sort of person, I believe," replied Mr. Dombey.

The haughty coldness of the reply seemed to afford Major Bagstock infinite delight. He swelled and swelled exceedingly: and even laid down his knife and fork for a moment, to rub his hands.

"Old Joe, sir," said the major, "was a bit of a favourite in that quarter once. But Joe has had his day. J. Bagstock is extinguished—out-rivalled—floored, sir. I tell you what, Dombey." The major paused in his eating, and looked mysteriously indignant. "That's a de-vilish ambitious woman, sir."

Mr. Dombey said "Indeed!" with frigid indifference: mingled, perhaps, with some contemptuous incredulity as to Miss Tox having the presumption to harbour such a superior quality.

"That woman, sir," said the major, "is, in her way, a Lucifer. Joey B. has had his day, sir, but he keeps his eyes. He sees, does Joe. His Royal Highness the late Duke of York observed of Joey, at a levee, that he saw."

The major accompanied this with such a look, and, between eating, drinking, hot tea, devilled grill, muffins, and meaning, was altogether so swollen and inflamed about the head, that even Mr. Dombey showed some anxiety for him.

"That ridiculous old spectacle, sir," pursued the major, "aspires. She aspires sky-high, sir. Matrimonially, Dombey."

"I am sorry for her," said Mr. Dombey.

"Don't say that, Dombey," returned the major in a warning voice.

"Why should I not, major?" said Mr. Dombey.

The major gave no answer but the horse's cough, and went on eating vigorously.

"She has taken an interest in your household," said the major, stopping short again, "and been a frequent visitor at your house for some time now."

"Yes," replied Mr. Dombey with great stateliness, "Miss Tox was originally received there, at the time of Mrs. Dombey's death, as a friend

of my sister's; and being a well-behaved person, and showing a liking for the poor infant, she was permitted—I may say encouraged—to repeat her visits, with my sister, and gradually to occupy a kind of footing of familiarity in the family. I have," said Mr. Dombey, in the tone of a man who was making a great and valuable concession, "I have a respect for Miss Tox. She has been so obliging as to render many little services in my house: trifling and insignificant services, perhaps, major, but not to be disparaged on that account: and I hope I have had the good fortune to be enabled to acknowledge them by such attention and notice as it has been in my power to bestow. I hold myself indebted to Miss Tox, major," added Mr. Dombey, with a slight wave of his hand, "for the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Dombey," said the major warmly; "no! No, sir! Joseph Bagstock can never permit that assertion to pass uncontradicted. Your knowledge of old Joe, sir, such as he is, and old Joe's knowledge of you, sir, had its origin in a noble fellow, sir—in a great creature, sir. Dombey!" said the major, with a struggle which it was not very difficult to parade, his whole life being a struggle against all kinds of apoplectic symptoms, "we know each other through your boy."

Mr. Dombey seemed touched, as it is not improbable the major designed he should be, by this allusion. He looked down and sighed: and the major, rousing himself fiercely, again said, in reference to the state of mind into which he felt himself in danger of falling, that this was weakness, and nothing should induce him to submit to it.

"Our friend had a remote connection with that event," said the major, "and all the credit that belongs to her J. B. is willing to give her, sir. Notwithstanding which, ma'am," he added, raising his eyes from his plate, and casting them across Princess's Place, to where Miss Tox was at that moment visible at her window watering her flowers, "you're a scheming jade, ma'am, and your ambition is a piece of monstrous impudence. If it only made yourself ridiculous, ma'am," said the major, rolling his head at the unconscious Miss Tox, while his starting eyes appeared to make a leap towards her, "you might do that to your heart's content, ma'am, without any objection, I assure you, on the part of Bagstock." Here the major laughed frightfully up in the tips of his ears and in the veins of his head. "But when, ma'am," said the major, "you compromise other people, and generous, unsuspecting people too, as a repay-

ment for their condescension, you stir the blood of old Joe in his body."

"Major," said Mr. Dombey, reddening, "I hope you do not hint at anything so absurd on the part of Miss Tox as——"

"Dombey," returned the major, "I hint at nothing. But Joey B. has lived in the world, sir: lived in the world with his eyes open, sir, and his ears cocked: and Joe tells you, Dombey, that there's a de-vilish artful and ambitious woman over the way."

Mr. Dombey involuntarily glanced over the way; and an angry glance he sent in that direction, too.

"That's all on such a subject that shall pass the lips of Joseph Bagstock," said the major firmly. "Joe is not a tale-bearer, but there are times when he must speak, when he *will* speak!—confound your arts, ma'am," cried the major, again apostrophizing his fair neighbour, with great ire—"when the provocation is too strong to admit of his remaining silent."

The emotion of this outbreak threw the major into a paroxysm of horse's coughs, which held him for a long time. On-recovering, he added:

"And now, Dombey, as you have invited Joe—old Joe, who has no other merit, sir, but that he is tough and hearty—to be your guest and guide at Leamington, command him in any way you please, and he is wholly yours. I don't know, sir," said the major, wagging his double chin with a jocose air, "what it is you people see in Joe to make you hold him in such great request, all of you; but this I know, sir, that if he wasn't pretty tough, and obstinate in his refusals, you'd kill him among you, with your invitations and so forth, in double-quick time."

Mr. Dombey, in a few words, expressed his sense of the preference he received over those other distinguished members of society who were clamouring for the possession of Major Bagstock. But the major cut him short by giving him to understand that he followed his own inclinations, and that they had risen up in a body, and said with one accord, "J. B., Dombey is the man for you to choose as a friend."

The major being by this time in a state of repletion, with essence of savoury pie oozing out at the corners of his eyes, and devilled grill and kidneys tightening his cravat: and the time, moreover, approaching for the departure of the railway train to Birmingham, by which they were to leave town: the native got him into his great-coat with immense difficulty, and buttoned him up until his face looked staring and gasping, over the top of that garment, as if he were in a barrel. The native then handed him separately,

and with a decent interval between each supply, his wash-leather gloves, his thick stick, and his hat; which latter article the major wore with a rakish air, on one side of his head, by way of toning down his remarkable visage. The native had previously packed, in all possible and impossible parts of Mr. Dombey's chariot, which was in waiting, an unusual quantity of carpet bags and small portmanteaus, no less apoplectic in appearance than the major himself: and having filled his own pockets with Seltzer water, East India sherry, sandwiches, shawls, telescopes, maps, and newspapers, any or all of which light baggage the major might require at any instant of his journey, he announced that everything was ready. To complete the equipment of this unfortunate foreigner (currently believed to be a prince in his own country), when he took his seat in the rumble by the side of Mr. Towlinson, a pile of the major's cloaks and great-coats was hurled upon him by the landlord, who aimed at him from the pavement with those great missiles like a Titan, and so covered him up, that he proceeded in a living tomb to the railroad station.

But before the carriage moved away, and while the native was in the act of sepulture, Miss Tox, appearing at her window, waved a lily-white handkerchief. Mr. Dombey received this parting salutation very coldly—very coldly even for him—and honouring her with the slightest possible inclination of his head, leaned back in the carriage with a very discontented look. His marked behaviour seemed to afford the major (who was all politeness in his recognition of Miss Tox) unbounded satisfaction; and he sat for a long time afterwards, leering and choking, like an over-fed Mephistophiles.

During the bustle of preparation at the railway, Mr. Dombey and the major walked up and down the platform side by side; the former taciturn and gloomy, and the latter entertaining him, or entertaining himself, with a variety of anecdotes and reminiscences, in most of which Joe Bagstock was the principal performer. Neither of the two observed that, in the course of these walks, they attracted the attention of a working-man who was standing near the engine, and who touched his hat every time they passed; for Mr. Dombey habitually looked over the vulgar herd, not at them; and the major was looking, at the time, into the core of one of his stories. At length, however, this man stepped before them as they turned round, and pulling his hat off, and keeping it off, ducked his head to Mr. Dombey.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the man, "but hope you're a doin' pretty well, sir."

He was dressed in a canvas suit abundantly besmeared with coal-dust and oil, and had cinders in his whiskers, and a smell of half-slaked ashes all over him. He was not a bad-looking fellow, nor even what could be fairly called a dirty-looking fellow, in spite of this; and, in short, he was Mr. Toodle professionally clothed.

"I shall have the honour of stokin' of you down, sir," said Mr. Toodle. "Beg your pardon, sir. I hope you find yourself a-comin' round?"

Mr. Dombey looked at him, in return for his tone of interest, as if a man like that would make his very eyesight dirty.

"Scuse the liberty, sir," said Toodle, seeing he was not clearly remembered, "but my wife Polly, as was called Richards in your family——"

A change in Mr. Dombey's face, which seemed to express recollection of him, and so it did, but it expressed in a much stronger degree an angry sense of humiliation, stopped Mr. Toodle short.

"Your wife wants money, I suppose," said Mr. Dombey, putting his hand in his pocket, and speaking (but that he always did) haughtily.

"No, thankee, sir," returned Toodle, "I can't say she does. I don't."

Mr. Dombey was stopped short now in his turn: and awkwardly: with his hand in his pocket.

"No, sir," said Toodle, turning his oil-skin cap round and round; "we're a doin' pretty well, sir; we haven't no cause to complain in the worldly way, sir. We've had four more since then, sir, but we rubs on."

Mr. Dombey would have rubbed on to his own carriage, though in so doing he had rubbed the stoker underneath the wheels; but his attention was arrested by something in connection with the cap still going slowly round and round in the man's hand.

"We lost one, babby," observed Toodle, "there's no denyin'."

"Latey," added Mr. Dombey, looking at the cap.

"No, sir, up'ard of three years ago, but all the rest is hearty. And in the matter o' readin', sir," said Toodle, ducking again, as if to remind Mr. Dombey of what had passed between them on that subject long ago, "them boys o' mine, they learned me, among 'em, arter all. They've made a wery tolerable scholar of me, sir, them boys."

"Come, major!" said Mr. Dombey.

"Beg your pardon, sir," resumed Toodle, taking a step before them, and deferentially stopping them again, still cap in hand: "I wouldn't have troubled you with such a pint

except as a way of gettin' in the name of my son Biler—christened Robin—him as you was so good as to make a Charitable Grinder on."

"Well, man," said Mr. Dombey in his severest manner, "what about him?"

"Why, sir," returned Toodle, shaking his head with a face of great anxiety and distress, "I'm forced to say, sir, that he's gone wrong."

"He has gone wrong, has he?" said Mr. Dombey, with a hard kind of satisfaction.

"He has fell into bad company, you see,

gentlemen," pursued the father, looking wistfully at both, and evidently taking the major into the conversation with the hope of having his sympathy. "He has got into bad ways. God send he may come to again, gentlemen, but he's on the wrong track now! You could hardly be off hearing of it somehow, sir," said Toodle, again addressing Mr. Dombey individually; "and it's better I should out and say my boy's gone rather wrong. Polly's dreadful down about it, gentlemen," said Toodle, with the same dejected look, and another appeal to the major.



"TAKE ADVICE FROM PLAIN OLD JOE, AND NEVER EDUCATE THAT SORT OF PEOPLE, SIR," RETURNED THE MAJOR. "DAMME, SIR, IT NEVER DOES! IT ALWAYS FAILS!"

"A son of this man's, whom I caused to be educated, major," said Mr. Dombey, giving him his arm. "The usual return!"

"Take advice from plain old Joe, and never educate that sort of people, sir," returned the major. "Damme, sir, it never does! It always fails!"

The simple father was beginning to submit that he hoped his son, the quondam Grinder, huffed and cuffed, and flogged and badged, and taught, as parrots are, by a brute jobbed into his place of schoolmaster with as much fitness for

it as a hound, might not have been educated on quite a right plan in some undiscovered respect, when Mr. Dombey, angrily repeating, "The usual return!" led the major away. And the major, being heavy to hoist into Mr. Dombey's carriage, elevated in mid-air, and having to stop and swear that he would flay the native alive, and break every bone in his skin, and visit other physical torments upon him, every time he couldn't get his foot on the step, and fell back on that dark exile, had barely time before they started to repeat hoarsely that it would never

do : that it always failed : and that, if he were to educate "his own vagabond," he would certainly be hanged.

Mr. Dombey assented bitterly ; but there was something more in his bitterness, and in his moody way of falling back in the carriage, and looking with knitted brows at the changing objects without, than the failure of that noble educational system administered by the Grinders' Company. He had seen upon the man's rough cap a piece of new crape, and he had assured himself, from his manner and his answers, that he wore it for his son.

So ! from high to low, at home or abroad, from Florence in his great house to the coarse churl who was feeding the fire then smoking before them, every one set up some claim or other to a share in his dead boy, and was a bidder against him ! Could he ever forget how that woman had wept over his pillow, and called him her own child ? or how he, waking from his sleep, had asked for her, and had raised himself in his bed and brightened when she came in ?

To think of this presumptuous raker among coals and ashes going on before there, with his sign of mourning ! To think that he dared to enter, even by a common show like that, into the trial and disappointment of a proud gentleman's secret heart ! To think that this lost child, who was to have divided with him his riches, and his projects, and his power, and allied with whom he was to have shut out all the world as with a double door of gold, should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes, and their boasts of claiming community of feeling with himself, so far removed : if not of having crept into the place wherein he would have lorded it alone !

He found no pleasure or relief in the journey. Tortured by these thoughts, he carried monotony with him through the rushing landscape, and hurried headlong, not through a rich and varied country, but a wilderness of blighted plans and gnawing jealousies. The very speed at which the train was whirled along mocked the swift course of the young life that had been borne away so steadily and so inexorably to its foredoomed end. The power that forced itself upon its iron way—its own—defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster, Death !

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, from the town, burrowing among the dwellings of men and making the streets hum, flashing out into the meadows for a moment, mining in

through the damp earth, booming on in darkness and heavy air, bursting out again into the sunny day so bright and wide ; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly within him : like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death !

Through the hollow, on the height, by the heath, by the orchard, by the park, by the garden, over the canal, across the river, where the sheep are feeding, where the mill is going, where the barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the factory is smoking, where the stream is running, where the village clusters, where the great cathedral rises, where the bleak moor lies, and the wild breeze smooths or ruffles it at its inconstant will ; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, and no trace to leave behind but dust and vapour : like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death !

Breasting the wind and light, the shower and sunshine, away, and still away, it rolls and roars, fierce and rapid, smooth and certain, and great works and massive bridges, crossing up above, fall like a beam of shadow an inch broad upon the eye, and then are lost. Away, and still away, onward and onward ever : glimpses of cottage homes, of houses, mansions, rich estates, of husbandry and handicraft, of people, of old roads and paths that look deserted, small, and insignificant as they are left behind ; and so they do, and what else is there but such glimpses in the track of the indomitable monster, Death ?

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, plunging down into the earth again, and working on in such a storm of energy and perseverance, that amidst the darkness and whirlwind the motion seems reversed, and to tend furiously backward, until a ray of light upon the wet wall shows its surface flying past like a fierce stream. Away once more into the day, and through the day, with a shrill yell of exultation, roaring, rattling, tearing on, spurning everything with its dark breath, sometimes pausing for a minute where a crowd of faces are, that in a minute more are not : sometimes lapping water greedily, and before the spout at which it drinks has ceased to drip upon the ground, shrieking, roaring, rattling through the purple distance !

Louder and louder yet, it shrieks and cries as it comes tearing on resistless to the goal ; and now its way, still like the way of Death, is strewn

with ashes thickly. Everything around is blackened. There are dark pools of water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations far below. There are jagged walls and falling houses close at hand, and through the battered roofs and broken windows wretched rooms are seen, where want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, while smoke and crowded gables, and distorted chimneys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance. As Mr. Dombey looks out of his carriage-window, it is never in his thoughts that the monster who has brought him there has let the light of day in on those things: not made or caused them. It was the journey's fitting end, and might have been the end of everything; it was so ruinous and dreary.

So, pursuing the one course of thought, he had the one relentless monster still before him. All things looked black, and cold, and deadly upon him, and he on them. He found a likeness to his misfortune everywhere. There was a remorseless triumph going on about him, and it galled and stung him in his pride and jealousy, whatever form it took: though most of all when it divided with him the love and memory of his lost boy.

There was a face—he had looked upon it, on the previous night, and it on him with eyes that read his soul, though they were dim with tears, and hidden soon behind two quivering hands—that often had attended him in fancy—on this ride. He had seen it, with the expression of last night, timidly pleading to him. It was not reproachful, but there was something of doubt, almost of hopeful incredulity in it, which, as he once more saw that fade away into a desolate certainty of his dislike, was like reproach. It was a trouble to him to think of this face of Florence.

Because he felt any new compunction towards it? No. Because the feeling it awakened in him—of which he had had some old foreshadowing in older times—was full-formed now, and spoke out plainly, moving him too much, and threatening to grow too strong for his composure. Because the face was abroad, in the expression of defeat and persecution that seemed to encircle him like the air. Because it barbed the arrow of that cruel and remorseless enemy on which his thoughts so ran, and put into its grasp a double-handed sword. Because he knew full well, in his own breast, as he stood there, tinging the scene of transition before him with the morbid colours of his own mind, and making it a ruin and a picture of decay, instead of hopeful change, and promise of better things,

that life had quite as much to do with his complainings as death. One child was gone, and one child left. Why was the object of his hope removed instead of her?

The sweet, calm, gentle presence in his fancy moved him to no reflection but that. She had been unwelcome to him from the first; she was an aggravation of his bitterness now. If his son had been his only child, and the same blow had fallen on him, it would have been heavy to bear; but infinitely lighter than now, when it might have fallen on her (whom he could have lost, or he believed it, without a pang), and had not. Her loving and innocent face, rising before him, had no softening or winning influence. He rejected the angel, and took up with the tormenting spirit crouching in his bosom. Her patience, goodness, youth, devotion, love, were as so many atoms in the ashes upon which he set his heel. He saw her image in the blight and blackness all around him, not irradiating, but deepening the gloom. More than once upon this journey, and now again as he stood pondering at this journey's end, tracing figures in the dust with his stick, the thought came into his mind, what was there he could interpose between himself and it?

The major, who had been blowing and panting all the way down, like another engine, and whose eye had often wandered from his newspaper to leer at the prospect, as if there were a great procession of discomfited Miss Toxes pouring out in the smoke of the train, and flying away over the fields to hide themselves in any place of refuge, aroused his friend by informing him that the post-horses were harnessed and the carriage ready.

"Dombey," said the major, rapping him on the arm with his cane, "don't be thoughtful. It's a bad habit. Old Joe, sir, wouldn't be as tough as you see him, if he had ever encouraged it. You are too great a man, Dombey, to be thoughtful. In your position, sir, you're far above that kind of thing."

The major, even in his friendly remonstrances, thus consulting the dignity and honour of Mr. Dombey, and showing a lively sense of their importance, Mr. Dombey felt more than ever disposed to defer to a gentleman possessing so much good sense and such a well-regulated mind. Accordingly, he made an effort to listen to the major's stories, as they trotted along the turnpike road; and the major, finding both the pace and the road a great deal better adapted to his conversational powers than the mode of travelling they had just relinquished, came out for his entertainment.

In this flow of spirits and conversation, only interrupted by his usual plethoric symptoms, and by intervals of lunch, and from time to time by some violent assault upon the native, who wore a pair of ear-rings in his dark brown ears, and on whom his European clothes sat with an outlandish impossibility of adjustment—being of their own accord, and without any reference to the tailor's art, long where they ought to be short, short where they ought to be long, tight where they ought to be loose, and loose where they ought to be tight—and to which he imparted a new grace, whenever the major attacked him, by shrinking into them like a shrivelled nut, or a cold monkey—in this flow of spirits and conversation the major continued all day: so that when evening came on, and found them trotting through the green and leafy road near Leamington, the major's voice, what with talking and eating and chuckling and choking, appeared to be in the box under the rumble, or in some neighbouring haystack. Nor did the major improve it at the Royal Hotel, where rooms and dinner had been ordered, and where he so oppressed his organs of speech by eating and drinking, that when he retired to bed he had no voice at all, except to cough with, and could only make himself intelligible to the dark servant by gasping at him.

He not only rose next morning, however, like a giant refreshed, but conducted himself at breakfast like a giant refreshing. At this meal they arranged their daily habits. The major was to take the responsibility of ordering everything to eat and drink; and they were to have a late breakfast together every morning, and a late dinner together every day. Mr. Dombey would prefer remaining in his own room, or walking in the country by himself, on that first day of their sojourn at Leamington; but next morning he would be happy to accompany the major to the Pump-room, and about the town. So they parted until dinner-time. Mr. Dombey retired to nurse his wholesome thoughts in his own way. The major, attended by the native carrying a camp-stool, a great-coat, and an umbrella, swaggered up and down through all the public places; looking into subscription books to find out who was there, looking up old ladies by whom he was much admired, reporting J. B. tougher than ever, and puffing his rich friend Dombey wherever he went. There never was a man who stood by a friend more staunchly than the major, when, in puffing him, he puffed himself.

It was surprising how much new conversation the major had to let off at dinner-time, and what occasion he gave Mr. Dombey to admire his

social qualities. At breakfast next morning, he knew the contents of the latest newspapers received; and mentioned several subjects in connection with them, on which his opinion had recently been sought by persons of such power and might, that they were only to be obscurely hinted at. Mr. Dombey, who had been so long shut up within himself, and who had rarely, at any time, overstepped the enchanted circle within which the operations of Dombey and Son were conducted, began to think this an improvement on his solitary life: and in place of excusing himself for another day, as he had thought of doing when alone, walked out with the major arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEW FACES.

THE major, more blue-faced and staring—more over-ripe, as it were, than ever—and giving vent, every now and then, to one of the horse's coughs, not so much of necessity as in a spontaneous explosion of importance, walked arm-in-arm with Mr. Dombey up the sunny side of the way, with his cheeks swelling over his tight stock, his legs majestically wide apart, and his great head wagging from side to side, as if he were remonstrating within himself for being such a captivating object. They had not walked many yards before the major encountered somebody he knew, nor many yards farther before the major encountered somebody else he knew, but he merely shook his fingers at them as he passed, and led Mr. Dombey on: pointing out the localities as they went, and enlivening the walk with any current scandal suggested by them.

In this manner the major and Mr. Dombey were walking arm-in-arm, much to their own satisfaction, when they beheld advancing towards them a wheeled chair, in which a lady was seated, indolently steering her carriage by a kind of rudder in front, while it was propelled by some unseen power in the rear. Although the lady was not young, she was very blooming in the face—quite rosy—and her dress and attitude were perfectly juvenile. Walking by the side of the chair, and carrying her gossamer parasol with a proud and weary air, as if so great an effort must be soon abandoned, and the parasol dropped, sauntered a much younger lady, very handsome, very haughty, very wilful, who tossed her head and drooped her eyelids, as though, if

there were anything in all the world worth looking into, save a mirror, it certainly was not the earth or sky.

"Why, what the devil have we here, sir?" cried the major, stopping as this little cavalcade drew near.

"My dearest Edith!" drawled the lady in the chair, "Major Bagstock!"

The major no sooner heard the voice than he relinquished Mr. Dombey's arm, darted forward, took the hand of the lady in the chair, and pressed it to his lips. With no less gallantry the major folded both his gloves upon his heart, and bowed low to the other lady. And now, the chair having stopped, the motive power became visible in the shape of a flushed page pushing behind, who seemed to have in part outgrown and in part outpushed his strength, for when he stood upright he was tall, and wan, and thin, and his plight appeared the more forlorn from his having injured the shape of his hat, by butting at the carriage with his head to urge it forward, as is sometimes done by elephants in Oriental countries.

"Joe Bagstock," said the major to both ladies, "is a proud and happy man for the rest of his life."

"You false creature!" said the old lady in the chair insipidly. "Where do you come from? I can't bear you."

"Then suffer old Joe to present a friend, ma'am," said the major promptly, "as a reason for being tolerated. Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Skewton." The lady in the chair was gracious. "Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Granger." The lady with the parasol was faintly conscious of Mr. Dombey's taking off his hat, and bowing low. "I am delighted, sir," said the major, "to have this opportunity."

The major seemed in earnest, for he looked at all the three, and leered in his ugliest manner.

"Mrs. Skewton, Dombey," said the major, "makes havoc in the heart of old Josh."

Mr. Dombey signified that he didn't wonder at it.

"You perfidious goblin," said the lady in the chair, "have done! How long have you been here, bad man?"

"One day," replied the major.

"And can you be a day, or even a minute," returned the lady, slightly settling her false curls and false eyebrows with her fan, and showing her false teeth, set off by her false complexion, "in the garden of what's-its-name——"

"Eden, I suppose, mamma," interrupted the younger lady scornfully.

"My dear Edith," said the other, "I cannot

help it. I never can remember those frightful names—without having your whole soul and being inspired by the sight of Nature; by the perfume," said Mrs. Skewton, rustling a handkerchief that was faint and sickly with essences, "of her artless breath, you creature?"

The discrepancy between Mrs. Skewton's fresh enthusiasm of words and forlornly faded manner was hardly less observable than that between her age, which was about seventy, and her dress, which would have been youthful for twenty-seven. Her attitude in the wheeled chair (which she never varied) was one in which she had been taken in a barouche, some fifty years before, by a then fashionable artist, who had appended to his published sketch the name of Cleopatra: in consequence of a discovery made by the critics of the time, that it bore an exact resemblance to that princess as she reclined on board her galley. Mrs. Skewton was a beauty then, and bucks threw wine-glasses over their heads by dozens in her honour. The beauty and the barouche had both passed away, but she still preserved the attitude, and, for this reason expressly, maintained the wheeled chair and the butting page: there being nothing whatever, except the attitude, to prevent her from walking.

"Mr. Dombey is devoted to Nature, I trust?" said Mrs. Skewton, settling her diamond brooch. And by the way, she chiefly lived upon the reputation of some diamonds, and her family connections.

"My friend Dombey, ma'am," returned the major, "may be devoted to her in secret, but a man who is paramount in the greatest city in the universe——"

"No one can be a stranger," said Mrs. Skewton, "to Mr. Dombey's immense influence."

As Mr. Dombey acknowledged the compliment with a bend of his head, the younger lady, glancing at him, met his eyes.

"You reside here, madam?" said Mr. Dombey, addressing her.

"No, we have been to a great many places. To Harrogate, and Scarborough, and into Devonshire. We have been visiting, and resting here and there. Mamma likes change."

"Edith, of course, does not," said Mrs. Skewton with a ghastly archness.

"I have not found that there is any change in such places," was the answer, delivered with supreme indifference.

"They libel me: There is only one change, Mr. Dombey," observed Mrs. Skewton with a mincing sigh, "for which I really care, and that I fear I shall never be permitted to enjoy. People cannot spare one. But se-

clusion and contemplation are my what's-his-name—"

"If you mean Paradise, mamma, you had better say so, to render yourself intelligible," said the younger lady.

"My dearest Edith," returned Mrs. Skewton, "you know that I am wholly dependent upon you for those odious names. I assure you, Mr. Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows—and china."

This curious association of objects, suggesting a remembrance of the celebrated bull who got by mistake into a crockery shop, was received with perfect gravity by Mr. Dombey, who intimated his opinion that Nature was, no doubt, a very respectable institution.

"What I want," drawled Mrs. Skewton, pinching her shrivelled throat, "is heart." It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that in which she used the phrase. "What I want is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial."

We were, indeed.

"In short," said Mrs. Skewton, "I want Nature, everywhere. It would be so extremely charming."

"Nature is inviting us away now, mamma, if you are ready," said the younger lady, curling her handsome lip. At this hint, the wan page, who had been surveying the party over the top of the chair, vanished behind it, as if the ground had swallowed him up.

"Stop a moment, Withers!" said Mrs. Skewton as the chair began to move; calling to the page with all the languid dignity with which she had called in days of yore to a coachman with a wig, cauliflower nosegay, and silk stockings. "Where are you staying, abomination?"

The major was staying at the Royal Hotel, with his friend Dombey.

"You may come and see us any evening when you are good," lisped Mrs. Skewton. "If Mr. Dombey will honour us, we shall be happy. Withers, go on!"

The major again pressed to his blue lips the tips of the fingers that were disposed on the ledge of the wheeled chair with careful carelessness; after the Cleopatra model: and Mr. Dombey bowed. The elder lady honoured them both with a very gracious smile and a girlish wave of her hand; the younger lady with the very slightest inclination of her head that common courtesy allowed.

The last glimpse of the wrinkled face of the mother, with that patched colour on it which the sun made infinitely more haggard and dismal than any want of colour could have been, and of the proud beauty of the daughter with her graceful figure and erect deportment, engendered such an involuntary disposition on the part of both the major and Mr. Dombey to look after them, that they both turned at the same moment. The page, nearly as much aslant as his own shadow, was toiling after the chair, uphill, like a slow battering-ram; the top of Cleopatra's bonnet was fluttering in exactly the same corner to the inch as before; and the Beauty, loitering by herself a little in advance, expressed in all her elegant form, from head to foot, the same supreme disregard of everything and everybody.

"I tell you what, sir," said the major as they resumed their walk again, "if Joe Bagstock were a younger man, there's not a woman in the world whom he'd prefer for Mrs. Bagstock to that woman. By George, sir!" said the major, "she's superb!"

"Do you mean the daughter?" inquired Mr. Dombey.

"Is Joey B. a turnip, Dombey," said the major, "that he should mean the mother?"

"You were complimentary to the mother," returned Mr. Dombey.

"An ancient flame, sir," chuckled Major Bagstock. "De-vilish ancient. I humour her."

"She impresses me as being perfectly genteel," said Mr. Dombey.

"Genteel, sir!" said the major, stopping short, and staring in his companion's face. "The Honourable Mrs. Skewton, sir, is sister to the late Lord Feenix, and aunt to the present lord. The family are not wealthy—they're poor, indeed—and she lives upon a small jointure; but if you come to blood, sir!" The major gave a flourish with his stick, and walked on again, in despair of being able to say what you came to, if you came to that.

"You addressed the daughter, I observed," said Mr. Dombey after a short pause, "as Mrs. Granger."

"Edith Skewton, sir!" returned the major, stopping short again, and punching a mark in the ground with his cane, to represent her, "married (at eighteen) Granger of Ours;" whom the major indicated by another punch. "Granger, sir," said the major, tapping the last ideal portrait, and rolling his head emphatically, "was Colonel of Ours: a de-vilish handsome fellow, sir, of forty-one. He died, sir, in the second year of his marriage." The major ran the representative of the deceased Granger through and

through the body with his walking-stick, and went on again, carrying his stick over his shoulder.

"How long is this ago?" asked Mr. Dombey, making another halt.

"Edith Granger, sir," replied the major, shutting one eye, putting his head on one side, passing his cane into his left hand, and smoothing his shirt-frill with his right, "is, at this present time, not quite thirty. And damme, sir," said the major, shouldering his stick once more, and walking on again, "she's a peerless woman!"

"Was there any family?" asked Mr. Dombey presently.

"Yes, sir," said the major. "There was a boy."

Mr. Dombey's eyes sought the ground, and a shade came over his face.

"Who was drowned, sir," pursued the major, "when a child of four or five years old."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Dombey, raising his head.

"By the upsetting of a boat in which his nurse had no business to have put him," said the major. "That's *his* history. Edith Granger is Edith Granger still; but if tough old Joey B., sir, were a little younger and a little richer, the name of that immortal paragon should be Bagstock."

The major heaved his shoulders and his cheeks, and laughed more like an over-fed Mephistophiles than ever, as he said the words.

"Provided the lady made no objection, I suppose?" said Mr. Dombey coldly.

"By Gad, sir," said the major, "the Bagstock breed are not accustomed to that sort of obstacle. Though it's true enough that Edith might have married twenty times, but for being proud, sir, proud."

Mr. Dombey seemed, by his face, to think no worse of her for that.

"It's a great quality after all," said the major. "By the Lord, it's a high quality! - Dombey! You are proud yourself, and your friend, old Joe, respects you for it, sir."

With this tribute to the character of his ally, which seemed to be wrung from him by the force of circumstances and the irresistible tendency of their conversation, the major closed the subject, and glided into a general exposition of the extent to which he had been beloved and doted on by splendid women and brilliant creatures.

On the next day but one, Mr. Dombey and the major encountered the Honourable Mrs. Skewton and her daughter in the Pump-room; on the day after, they met them again very near the place where they had met them first. After

meeting them thus three or four times in all, it became a point of mere civility to old acquaintances that the major should go there one evening. Mr. Dombey had not originally intended to pay visits, but, on the major announcing this intention, he said he would have the pleasure of accompanying him. So the major told the native to go round before dinner, and say, with his and Mr. Dombey's compliments, that they would have the honour of visiting the ladies that same evening, if the ladies were alone. In answer to which message, the native brought back a very small note with a very large quantity of scent about it, indited by the Honourable Mrs. Skewton to Major Bagstock, and briefly saying, "You are a shocking bear, and I have a great mind not to forgive you, but if you are very good indeed," which was underlined, "you may come. Compliments (in which Edith unites) to Mr. Dombey."

The Honourable Mrs. Skewton and her daughter, Mrs. Granger, resided, while at Leamington, in lodgings that were fashionable enough and dear enough, but rather limited in point of space and conveniences; so that the Honourable Mrs. Skewton, being in bed, had her feet in the window and her head in the fire-place, while the Honourable Mrs. Skewton's maid was quartered in a closet within the drawing-room, so extremely small, that, to avoid developing the whole of its accommodations, she was obliged to writhe in and out of the door like a beautiful serpent. Withers, the wan page, slept out of the house immediately under the tiles at a neighbouring milk-shop; and the wheeled chair, which was the stone of that young Sisyphus, passed the night in a shed belonging to the same dairy, where new-laid eggs were produced by the poultry connected with the establishment, who roosted on a broken donkey-cart—persuaded, to all appearance, that it grew there, and was a species of tree.

Mr. Dombey and the major found Mrs. Skewton arranged, as Cleopatra, among the cushions of a sofa; very airily dressed; and certainly not resembling Shakspeare's Cleopatra, whom age could not wither. On their way up-stairs they had heard the sound of a harp, but it had ceased on their being announced, and Edith now stood beside it, handsomer and haughtier than ever. It was a remarkable characteristic of this lady's beauty that it appeared to vaunt and assert itself without her aid, and against her will. She knew that she was beautiful: it was impossible that it could be otherwise: but she seemed with her own pride to defy her very self.

Whether she held cheap attractions that could

only call forth admiration that was worthless to her, or whether she designed to render them more precious to admirers by this usage of them, those to whom they *were* precious seldom paused to consider.

"I hope, Mrs. Granger," said Mr. Dombey, advancing a step towards her, "we are not the cause of your ceasing to play?"

"You? Oh no!"

"Why do you not go on, then, my dearest Edith?" said Cleopatra.

"I left off as I began—of my own fancy."

The exquisite indifference of her manner in saying this: an indifference quite removed from dullness or insensibility, for it was pointed with proud purpose: was well set off by the carelessness with which she drew her hand across the strings, and came from that part of the room.

"Do you know, Mr. Dombey," said her languishing mother, playing with a hand-screen, "that occasionally my dearest Edith and myself actually almost differ——"

"Not quite, sometimes, mamma?" said Edith.

"Oh, never quite, my darling! Fie, fie, it would break my heart," returned her mother, making a faint attempt to pat her with the screen, which Edith made no movement to meet. "—About these cold conventionalities of manner that are observed in little things? Why are we not more natural? Dear me! With all those yearnings, and gushings, and impulsive throbblings that we have implanted in our souls, and which are so very charming, why are we not more natural?"

Mr. Dombey said it was very true, very true.

"We could be more natural, I suppose, if we tried?" said Mrs. Skewton.

Mr. Dombey thought it possible.

"Devil a bit, ma'am," said the major. "We couldn't afford it. Unless the world was peopled with J. B.'s—tough and blunt old Joes, ma'am, plain red herrings with hard roes, sir—we couldn't afford it. It wouldn't do."

"You naughty infidel," said Mrs. Skewton, "be mute."

"Cleopatra commands," returned the major, kissing his hand, "and Antony Bagstock obeys."

"The man has no sensitiveness," said Mrs. Skewton, cruelly holding up the hand-screen so as to shut the major out. "No sympathy. And what do we live for *but* sympathy? What else is so extremely charming? Without that gleam of sunshine on our cold, cold earth," said Mrs. Skewton, arranging her lace tucker, and complacently observing the effect of her bare lean arm, looking upward from the wrist, "how could we possibly bear it? In short, obdurate man!"

glancing at the major round the screen, "I would have my world all heart; and Faith is so excessively charming, that I won't allow you to disturb it, do you hear?"

The major replied that it was hard in Cleopatra to require the world to be all heart, and yet to appropriate to herself the hearts of all the world; which obliged Cleopatra to remind him that flattery was unsupportable to her, and that, if he had the boldness to address her in that strain any more, she would positively send him home.

Withers the Wan, at this period, hauding round the tea, Mr. Dombey again addressed himself to Edith.

"There is not much company here, it would seem?" said Mr. Dombey in his own portentous, gentlemanly way.

"I believe not. We see none."

"Why, really," observed Mrs. Skewton from her couch, "there are no people here just now with whom we care to associate."

"They have not enough heart," said Edith with a smile. The very twilight of a smile: so singularly were its light and darkness blended.

"My dearest Edith rallies me, you see!" said her mother, shaking her head: which shook a little of itself sometimes, as if the palsy twinkled now and then in opposition to the diamonds. "Wicked one!"

"You have been here before, if I am not mistaken?" said Mr. Dombey. Still to Edith.

"Oh, several times. I think we have been everywhere."

"A beautiful country!"

"I suppose it is. Everybody says so."

"Your cousin Feenix raves about it, Edith," interposed her mother from her couch.

The daughter slightly turned her graceful head, and raising her eyebrows by a hair's breadth, as if her cousin Feenix were of all the mortal world the least to be regarded, turned her eyes again towards Mr. Dombey.

"I hope, for the credit of my good taste, that I am tired of the neighbourhood," she said.

"You have almost reason to be, madam," he replied, glancing at a variety of landscape drawings, of which he had already recognised several as representing neighbouring points of view, and which were strewn abundantly about the room, "if these beautiful productions are from your hand."

She gave him no reply, but sat in a disdainful beauty, quite amazing.

"Have they that interest?" said Mr. Dombey. "Are they yours?"

"Yes."

"And you play, I already know."

"Yes."

"And sing?"

"Yes."

She answered all these questions with a strange reluctance; and with that remarkable air of opposition to herself, already noticed as belonging to her beauty. Yet she was not embarrassed, but wholly self-possessed. Neither did she seem to wish to avoid the conversation, for she ad-

ressed her face, and—so far as she could—her manner also, to him; and continued to do so when he was silent.

"You have many resources against weariness at least," said Mr. Dombey:

"Whatever their efficiency may be," she returned, "you know them all now. I have no more."

"May I hope to prove them all?" said Mr. Dombey with solemn gallantry, laying down a



"WITHERS THE WAN, AT THIS PERIOD, HANDING ROUND THE TEA," MR. DOMBEY AGAIN ADDRESSED HIMSELF TO EDITH."

drawing he had held, and motioning towards the harp.

"Oh, certainly! If you desire it!"

She rose as she spoke, and crossing by her mother's couch, and directing a stately look towards her, which was instantaneous in its duration, but inclusive (if any one had seen it) of a multitude of expressions, among which that of the twilight smile, without the smile itself, overshadowed all the rest, went out of the room.

The major, who was quite forgiven by this time, had wheeled a little table up to Cleopatra, and was sitting down to play piquet with her. Mr. Dombey, not knowing the game, sat down to watch them for his edification until Edith should return.

"We are going to have some music, Mr. Dombey, I hope?" said Cleopatra.

"Mrs. Granger has been kind enough to promise so," said Mr. Dombey.

"Ah! That's very nice. Do you propose, major?"

"No, ma'am," said the major. "Couldn't do it."

"You're a barbarous being," replied the lady, "and my hand's destroyed. You are fond of music, Mr. Dombey?"

"Eminently so," was Mr. Dombey's answer.

"Yes. It's very nice," said Cleopatra, looking at her cards. "So much heart in it—undeveloped recollections of a previous state of existence—and all that—which is so truly charming. Do you know," simpered Cleopatra, reversing the knave of clubs, who had come into her game with his heels uppermost, "that if anything could tempt me to put a period to my life, it would be curiosity to find out what it's all about, and what it means; there are so many provoking mysteries, really, that are hidden from us. Major, you to play!"

The major played: and Mr. Dombey, looking on for his instruction, would soon have been in a state of dire confusion, but that he gave no attention to the game whatever, and sat wondering instead when Edith would come back.

She came at last, and sat down to her harp, and Mr. Dombey rose and stood beside her, listening. He had little taste for music, and no knowledge of the strain she played, but he saw her bending over it, and perhaps he heard among the sounding strings some distant music of his own, that tamed the monster of the iron road, and made it less inexorable.

Cleopatra had a sharp eye, verily, at piquet. It glistened like a bird's, and did not fix itself upon the game, but pierced the room from end to end, and gleamed on harp, performer, listener, everything.

When the haughty beauty had concluded, she arose, and receiving Mr. Dombey's thanks and compliments in exactly the same manner as before, went, with scarcely any pause, to the piano, and began there.

Edith Granger, any song but that! Edith Granger, you are very handsome, and your touch upon the keys is brilliant, and your voice is deep and rich; but not the air that his neglected daughter sang to his dead son!

"Alas! he knows it not; and if he did, what air of hers would stir him, rigid man? Sleep, lonely Florence, sleep! Peace in thy dreams, although the night has turned dark, and the clouds are gathering, and threaten to discharge themselves in hail!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A TRIFLE OF MANAGEMENT BY MR. CARKER THE MANAGER.

MR. CARKER the manager sat at his desk, smooth and soft as usual, reading those letters which were reserved for him to open, backing them occasionally with such memoranda and references as their business purport required, and parcelling them out into little heaps for distribution through the several departments of the house. The post had come in heavy that morning, and Mr. Carker the manager had a good deal to do.

The general action of a man so engaged—pausing to look over a bundle of papers in his hand, dealing them round in various portions, taking up another bundle and examining its contents with knitted brows and pursed-out lips—dealing, and sorting, and pondering by turns—would easily suggest some whimsical resemblance to a player at cards. The face of Mr. Carker the manager was in good keeping with such a fancy. It was the face of a man who studied his play warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand.

The letters were in various languages, but Mr. Carker the manager read them all. If there had been anything in the offices of Dombey and Son that he could *not* read, there would have been a card wanting in the pack. He read almost at a glance, and made combinations of one letter with another and one business with another as he went on, adding new matter to the heaps—much as a man would know the cards at sight, and work out their combinations in his mind after they were turned. Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr. Carker the manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the sky-light, playing his game alone.

And although it is not among the instincts, wild or domestic, of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr. Carker the manager, as he basked in the strip of summer light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but

feeble than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat: with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr. Carker the manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.

At length the letters were disposed of, excepting one which he reserved for a particular audience. Having locked the more confidential correspondence in a drawer, Mr. Carker the manager rang his bell.

"Why do *you* answer it?" was his reception of his brother.

"The messenger is out, and I am the next," was the submissive reply.

"You are the next?" muttered the manager.

"Yes! Creditable to me! There!"

Pointing to the heaps of opened letters, he turned disdainfully away in his elbow-chair, and broke the seal of that one which he held in his hand.

"I am sorry to trouble you, James," said the brother, gathering them up, "but——"

"Oh! You have something to say. I knew that. Well?"

Mr. Carker the manager did not raise his eyes or turn them on his brother, but kept them on his letter, though without opening it.

"Well?" he repeated sharply.

"I am uneasy about Harriet."

"Harriet who? What Harriet? I know nobody of that name."

"She is not well, and has changed very much of late."

"She changed very much a great many years ago," replied the manager; "and that is all I have to say."

"I think if you would hear me——"

"Why should I hear you, Brother John?" returned the manager, laying a sarcastic emphasis on those two words, and throwing up his head, but not lifting his eyes. "I tell you, Harriet Carker made her choice many years ago between her two brothers. She may repent it, but she must abide by it."

"Don't mistake me. I do not say she *does* repent it. It would be black ingratitude in me to hint at such a thing," returned the other. "Though, believe me, James, I am as sorry for her sacrifice as you."

"As I?" exclaimed the manager. "As I?"

"As sorry for her choice—for what you call her choice—as you are angry at it," said the junior.

"Angry?" repeated the other, with a wide show of his teeth.

"Displeased. Whatever word you like best. You know my meaning. There is no offence in my intention."

"There is offence in everything you do," replied his brother, glancing at him with a sudden scowl, which in a moment gave place to a wider smile than the last. "Carry those papers away, if you please. I am busy."

His politeness was so much more cutting than his wrath, that the junior went to the door. But stopping at it, and looking round, he said:

"When Harriet tried in vain to plead for me with you, on your first just indignation, and my first disgrace; and when she left you, James, to follow my broken fortunes, and devote herself, in her mistaken affection, to a ruined brother, because, without her, he had no one, and was lost; she was young and pretty. I think if you could see her now—if you would go and see her—she would move your admiration and compassion."

The manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, as who should say, in answer to some careless small-talk, "Dear me! Is that the case?" but said never a word.

"We thought in those days: you and I both: that she would marry young, and lead a happy and light-hearted life," pursued the other. "Oh, if you knew how cheerfully she cast those hopes away; how cheerfully she has gone forward on the path she took, and never once looked back; you never could say again that her name was strange in your ears. Never!"

Again the manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, and seemed to say, "Remarkable indeed! You quite surprise me!" And again he uttered never a word.

"May I go on?" said John Carker mildly.

"On your way?" replied his smiling brother.

"If you will have the goodness."

John Carker, with a sigh, was passing slowly out at the door, when his brother's voice detained him for a moment on the threshold.

"If she has gone and goes her own way cheerfully," he said, throwing the still unfolded letter on his desk, and putting his hands firmly in his pockets, "you may tell her that I go as cheerfully on mine. If she has never once looked back, you may tell her that I have, sometimes, to recall her taking part with you, and that my resolution is no easier to wear

away"—he smiled very sweetly here—"than marble."

"I tell her nothing of you. We never speak about you. Once a year, on your birthday, Harriet says always, 'Let us remember James by name, and wish him happy,' but we say no more."

"Tell it then, if you please," returned the other, "to yourself. You can't repeat it too often, as a lesson to you to avoid the subject in speaking to me. I know no Harriet Carker. There is no such person. You may have a sister: make much of her. I have none."

Mr. Carker the manager took up the letter again, and waved it with a smile of mock courtesy towards the door. Unfolding it as his brother withdrew, and looking darkly after him as he left the room, he once more turned round in his elbow-chair, and applied himself to a diligent perusal of its contents.

It was in the writing of his great chief, Mr. Dombey, and dated from Leamington. Though he was a quick reader of all other letters, Mr. Carker read this slowly; weighing the words as he went, and bringing every tooth in his head to bear upon them. When he had read it through once, he turned it over again, and picked out these passages. "I find myself benefited by the change, and am not yet inclined to name any time for my return." "I wish, Carker, you would arrange to come down once and see me here, and let me know how things are going on, in person." "I omitted to speak to you about young Gay. If not gone per Son and Heir, or if Son and Heir still lying in the Docks, appoint some other young man, and keep him in the City for the present. I am not decided." "Now that's unfortunate," said Mr. Carker the manager, expanding his mouth, as if they were made of india-rubber: "for he's far away!"

Still that passage, which was in a postscript, attracted his attention and his teeth once more.

"I think," he said, "my good friend Captain Cuttle mentioned something about being towed along in the wake of that day. What a pity he's so far away!"

He refolded the letter, and was sitting trifling with it, standing it long-wise and broad-wise on his table, and turning it over and over on all sides—doing pretty much the same thing, perhaps; by its contents—when Mr. Perch the messenger knocked softly at the door, and coming in on tiptoe, bending his body at every step as if it were the delight of his life to bow, laid some papers on the table.

"Would you please to be engaged, sir?"

asked Mr. Perch, rubbing his hands, and deferentially putting his head on one side, like a man who felt he had no business to hold it up in such a presence, and would keep it as much out of the way as possible.

"Who wants me?"

"Why, sir," said Mr. Perch in a soft voice, "really nobody, sir, to speak of at present, Mr. Gills, the Ship's Instrument-maker, sir, has looked in about a little matter of payment, he says; but I mentioned to him, sir, that you was engaged several deep; several deep."

Mr. Perch coughed once behind his hand, and waited for further orders.

"Anybody else?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Perch, "I wouldn't of my own self take the liberty of mentioning, sir, that there was anybody else; but that same young lad that was here yesterday, sir, and last week, has been hanging about the place; and it looks, sir," added Mr. Perch, stopping to shut the door, "dreadful unbusiness-like to see him whistling to the sparrows down the court, and making of 'em answer him."

"You said he wanted something to do, didn't you, Perch?" asked Mr. Carker, leaning back in his chair, and looking at that officer.

"Why, sir," said Mr. Perch, coughing behind his hand again, "his expression certainly were that he was in wants of a situation, and that he considered something might be done for him about the Docks, being used to fishing with a rod and line; but—" Mr. Perch shook his head very dubiously indeed.

"What does he say when he comes?" asked Mr. Carker.

"Indeed, sir," said Mr. Perch, coughing another cough behind his hand, which was always his resource as an expression of humility when nothing else occurred to him, "his observation generally air that he would humbly wish to see one of the gentlemen, and that he wants to earn a living. But you see, sir," added Perch, dropping his voice to a whisper, and turning, in the inviolable nature of his confidence, to give the door a thrust with his hand and knee, as if that would shut it any more when it was shut already, "it's hardly to be bore, sir, that a common lad like that should come a prowling here, and saying that his mother nursed our House's young gentleman, and that he hopes our House will give him a chance on that account. I am sure, sir," observed Mr. Perch, "that although Mrs. Perch was at that time nursing as thriving a little girl, sir, as we've ever took the liberty of adding to our family, I wouldn't have made so free as drop a hint of

her being capable of imparting nourishment, not if it was ever so!"

Mr. Carker grinned at him like a shark, but in an absent, thoughtful manner.

"Whether," submitted Mr. Perch after a short silence and another cough, "it mightn't be best for me to tell him, that if he was seen here any more he would be given into custody; and to keep to it! With respect to bodily fear," said Mr. Perch, "I'm so timid, myself, by nature, sir, and my nerves is so unstrung by Mrs. Perch's state, that I could take my affidavit easy."

"Let me see this fellow, Perch," said Mr. Carker. "Bring him in!"

"Yes, sir. Begging your pardon, sir," said Mr. Perch, hesitating at the door, "he's rough, sir, in appearance."

"Never mind. If he's there, bring him in. I'll see Mr. Gills directly. Ask him to wait!"

Mr. Perch bowed; and shutting the door as precisely and carefully as if he were not coming back for a week, went on his quest among the sparrows in the court. While he was gone, Mr. Carker assumed his favourite attitude before the fire-place, and stood looking at the door, presenting, with his under lip tucked into the smile that showed his whole row of upper teeth, a singularly crouching appearance.

The messenger was not long in returning, followed by a pair of heavy boots that came bumping along the passage like boxes. With the unceremonious words, "Come along with you!"—a very unusual form of introduction from his lips, Mr. Perch then ushered into the presence a strong-built lad of fifteen, with a round red face, a round sleek head, round black eyes, round limbs, and round body, who, to carry out the general rotundity of his appearance, had a round hat in his hand, without a particle of brim to it.

Obedient to a nod from Mr. Carker, Perch had no sooner confronted the visitor with that gentleman than he withdrew. The moment they were face to face alone, Mr. Carker, without a word of preparation, took him by the throat, and shook him until his head seemed loose upon his shoulders.

The boy, who, in the midst of his astonishment, could not help staring wildly at the gentleman with so many white teeth, who was choking him, and at the office walls, as though determined, if he *were* choked, that his last look should be at the mysteries for his intrusion into which he was paying such a severe penalty, at last contrived to utter—

"Come, sir! You let me alone, will you?"

"Let you alone!" said Mr. Carker. "What! I have got you, have I?" There was no doubt of that, and tightly too. "You dog," said Mr. Carker, through his set jaws, "I'll strangle you!"

Biler whimpered, Would he, though? Oh no, he wouldn't!—and what was he doing of—and why didn't he strangle somebody of his own size, and not *him*? But Biler was quelled by the extraordinary nature of his reception, and, as his head became stationary, and he looked the gentleman in the face, or rather in the teeth, and saw him snarling at him, he so far forgot his manhood as to cry.

"I haven't done nothing to you, sir," said Biler, otherwise Rob, otherwise Grinder, and always Toodle.

"You young scoundrel!" replied Mr. Carker, slowly releasing him, and moving back a step into his favourite position. "What do you mean by daring to come here?"

"I didn't mean no harm, sir," whimpered Rob, putting one hand to his throat, and the knuckles of the other to his eyes. "I'll never come again, sir. I only wanted work."

"Work, young Cain that you are!" repeated Mr. Carker, eyeing him narrowly. "An't you the idlest vagabond in London?"

The impeachment, while it much affected Mr. Toodle junior, attached to his character so justly, that he could not say a word in denial. He stood looking at the gentleman, therefore, with a frightened, self-convicted, and remorseful air. As to his looking at him, it may be observed that he was fascinated by Mr. Carker, and never took his round eyes off him for an instant.

"An't you a thief?" said Mr. Carker, with his hands behind him in his pockets.

"No, sir," pleaded Rob.

"You are!" said Mr. Carker.

"I an't indeed, sir," whimpered Rob. "I never did such a thing as thieve, sir, if you'll believe me. I know I've been going wrong, sir, ever since I took to bird-catching and walking-matching. I'm sure a cove might think," said Mr. Toodle junior, with a burst of penitence, "that singing birds was innocent company, but nobody knows what harm is in them little creeturs, and what they brings you down to."

They seemed to have brought *him* down to a velveteen jacket and trousers very much the worse for wear, a particularly small red waistcoat like a gorget, an interval of blue check, and the hat before mentioned.

"I an't been home twenty times since them birds got their will of me" said Rob "and

that's ten months. How can I go home when everybody's miserable to see me? I wonder," said Biler, blubbing outright, and smearing his eyes with his coat-cuff, "that I haven't been and drowned myself over and over again."

All of which, including his expression of sur-

prise at not having achieved this last scarce performance, the boy said just as if the teeth of Mr. Carker drew it out of him, and he had no power of concealing anything with that battery of attraction in full play.

"You're a nice young gentleman!" said Mr.



"LET YOU ALONE!" SAID MR. CARKER. "WHAT! I HAVE GOT YOU, HAVE I?" THERE WAS NO DOUBT OF THAT, AND TIGHTLY TOO. "YOU DOG," SAID MR. CARKER, THROUGH HIS SET JAWS, "I'LL STRANGLE YOU!"

Carker, shaking his head at him. "There's hemp-seed sown for you, my fine fellow!"

"I'm sure, sir," returned the wretched Biler, blubbing again, and again having recourse to his coat-cuff, "I shouldn't care, sometimes, if it

was grown too. My misfortunes all began in wagging, sir; but what could I do, exceptin' wag?"

"Excepting what?" said Mr. Carker.

"Wag, sir. Wagging from school."

"Do you mean pretending to go there, and not going?" said Mr. Carker.

"Yes, sir, that's wagging, sir," returned the quondam Grinder, much affected. "I was chivied through the streets, sir, when I went there, and pounded when I got there. So I wagged, and hid myself, and that began it."

"And you mean to tell me," said Mr. Carker, taking him by the throat again, holding him out at arm's length, and surveying him in silence for some moments, "that you want a place, do you?"

"I should be thankful to be tried, sir," returned Toodle junior faintly.

Mr. Carker the manager pushed him backwards into a corner—the boy submitting quietly, hardly venturing to breathe, and never once removing his eyes from his face—and rang the bell.

"Tell Mr. Gills to come here."

Mr. Perch was too deferential to express surprise or recognition of the figure in the corner; and Uncle Sol appeared immediately.

"Mr. Gills!" said Carker with a smile, "sit down. How do you do? You continue to enjoy your health, I hope?"

"Thank you, sir," returned Uncle Sol, taking out his pocket-book, and handing over some notes as he spoke. "Nothing ails me in body but old age. Twenty-five, sir."

"You are as punctual and exact, Mr. Gills," replied the smiling manager, taking a paper from one of his many drawers, and making an endorsement on it, while Uncle Sol looked over him, "as one of your own chronometers. Quite right."

"The Son and Heir has not been spoken, I find by the list, sir," said Uncle Sol, with a slight addition to the usual tremor in his voice.

"The Son and Heir has not been spoken," returned Carker. "There seems to have been tempestuous weather, Mr. Gills, and she has probably been driven out of her course."

"She is safe, I trust in Heaven!" said old Sol.

"She is safe, I trust in Heaven!" assented Mr. Carker in that voiceless manner of his: which made the observant young Toodle tremble again. "Mr. Gills," he added aloud, throwing himself back in his chair, "you must miss your nephew very much?"

Uncle Sol, standing by him, shook his head, and heaved a deep sigh.

"Mr. Gills," said Carker, with his soft hand playing round his mouth, and looking up into the instrument-maker's face, "it would be company to you to have a young fellow in your shop

just now, and it would be obliging me if you would give one house room for the present. No, to be sure," he added quickly, in anticipation of what the old man was going to say, "there's not much business doing there, I know: but you can make him clean: the place out, polish up the instruments; drudge, Mr. Gills. That's the lad!"

Sol Gills pulled down his spectacles from his forehead to his eyes, and looked at Toodle junior standing upright in the corner: his head presenting the appearance (which it always did) of having been newly drawn out of a bucket of cold water; his small waistcoat rising and falling quickly in the play of his emotions; and his eyes intently fixed on Mr. Carker, without the least reference to his proposed master.

"Will you give him house room, Mr. Gills?" said the manager.

Old Sol, without being quite enthusiastic on the subject, replied that he was glad of any opportunity, however slight, to oblige Mr. Carker, whose wish on such a point was a command: and that the Wooden Midshipman would consider himself happy to receive in his berth any visitor of Mr. Carker's selecting.

Mr. Carker bared himself to the tops and bottoms of his gums: making the watchful Toodle junior tremble more and more: and acknowledged the instrument-maker's politeness in his most affable manner.

"I'll dispose of him so, then, Mr. Gills," he answered, rising, and shaking the old man by the hand, "until I make up my mind what to do with him, and what he deserves. As I consider myself responsible for him, Mr. Gills,"—here he smiled a wide smile at Rob, who shook before it,—"I shall be glad if you'll look sharply after him, and report his behaviour to me. I'll ask a question or two of his parents as I ride home this afternoon—respectable people—to confirm some particulars in his own account of himself; and that done, Mr. Gills, I'll send him round to you to-morrow morning. Good-bye!"

His smile at parting was so full of teeth, that it confused old Sol, and made him vaguely uncomfortable. He went home, thinking of raging seas, foundering ships, drowning men, an ancient bottle of madeira never brought to light, and other dismal matter.

"Now, boy!" said Mr. Carker, putting his hand on young Toodle's shoulder, and bringing him out into the middle of the room. "You have heard me?"

Rob said, "Yes, sir."

"Perhaps you understand," pursued his patron, "that if you ever deceive or play tricks

with me, you had better have drowned yourself indeed, once for all, before you came here?"

There was nothing in any branch of mental acquisition that Rob seemed to understand better than that.

"If you have lied to me," said Mr. Carker, "in anything, never come in my way again. If not, you may let me find you waiting for me somewhere near your mother's house this afternoon. I shall leave this at five o'clock, and ride there on horseback. Now, give me the address."

Rob repeated it slowly, as Mr. Carker wrote it down. Rob even spelt it over a second time, letter by letter, as if he thought that the omission of a dot or scratch would lead to his destruction. Mr. Carker then handed him out of the room: and Rob, keeping his round eyes fixed upon his patron to the last, vanished for the time being.

Mr. Carker the manager did a great deal of business in the course of the day, and bestowed his teeth upon a great many people. In the office, in the court, in the street, and on 'Change, they glistened and bristled to a terrible extent. Five o'clock arriving, and with it Mr. Carker's bay horse, they got on horseback, and went gleaming up Cheapside.

As no one can easily ride fast, even if inclined to do so, through the press and throng of the City at that hour, and as Mr. Carker was not inclined, he went leisurely along, picking his way among the carts and carriages, avoiding, whenever he could, the wetter and more dirty places in the over-watered road, and taking infinite pains to keep himself and his steed clean. Glancing at the passers-by while he was thus ambling on his way, he suddenly encountered the round eyes of the sleek-headed Rob intently fixed upon his face as if they had never been taken off, while the boy himself, with a pocket-handkerchief twisted up like a speckled eel, and girded round his waist, made a very conspicuous demonstration of being prepared to attend upon him, at whatever pace he might think proper to go.

This attention, however flattering, being one of an unusual kind, and attracting some notice from the other passengers, Mr. Carker took advantage of a clearer thoroughfare and a cleaner road, and broke into a trot. Rob immediately did the same. Mr. Carker presently tried a canter; Rob was still in attendance. Then a short gallop; it was all one to the boy. Whenever Mr. Carker turned his eyes to that side of the road, he still saw Toodle junior holding his course, apparently without distress, and working

himself along by the elbows after the most approved manner of professional gentlemen who get over the ground for wagers.

Ridiculous as this attendance was, it was a sign of an influence established over the boy, and therefore Mr. Carker, affecting not to notice it, rode away into the neighbourhood of Mr. Toodle's house. On his slackening his pace here, Rob appeared before him to point out the turnings; and when he called to a man at a neighbouring gateway to hold his horse, pending his visit to the Buildings that had succeeded Staggs's Gardens, Rob dutifully held the stirrup while the manager dismounted.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Carker, taking him by the shoulder, "come along!"

The prodigal son was evidently nervous of visiting the parental abode: but Mr. Carker pushing him on before, he had nothing for it but to open the right door, and suffer himself to be walked into the midst of his brothers and sisters, mustered in overwhelming force round the family tea-table. At sight of the prodigal in the grasp of a stranger, these tender relations united in a general howl, which smote upon the prodigal's breast so sharply when he saw his mother stand up among them, pale and trembling, with the baby in her arms, that he lent his own voice to the chorus.

Nothing doubting now that the stranger, if not Mr. Ketch in person, was one of that company, the whole of the young family wailed the louder, while its more infantine members, unable to control the transports of emotion appertaining to their time of life, threw themselves on their backs like young birds when terrified by a hawk, and kicked violently. At length, poor Polly, making herself audible, said, with quivering lips, "Oh, Rob, my poor boy, what have you done at last?"

"Nothing, mother," cried Bob in a piteous voice; "ask the gentleman!"

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Carker; "I want to do him good."

At this announcement, Polly, who had not cried yet, began to do so. The elder Toodles, who appeared to have been meditating a rescue; unclenched their fists. The younger Toodles clustered round their mother's gown, and peeped from under their own chubby arms at their desperado brother and his unknown friend. Everybody blessed the gentleman with the beautiful teeth, who wanted to do good.

"This fellow," said Mr. Carker to Polly, giving him a gentle shake, "is your son, eh, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir," sobbed Polly, with a curtsy; "yes, sir."

"A bad son, I am afraid?" said Mr. Carker.

"Neyer a bad son to me, sir," returned Polly.

"To whom, then?" demanded Mr. Carker.

"He has been a little wild, sir," replied Polly, checking the baby, who was making convulsive efforts with his arms and legs to launch himself on Biler, through the ambient air, "and has gone with wrong companions; but I hope he has seen the misery of that, sir, and will do well again."

Mr. Carker looked at Polly, and the clean room and the clean children, and the simple Tooodle face, combined of father and mother, that was reflected and repeated everywhere about him: and seemed to have achieved the real purpose of his visit.

"Your husband, I take it, is not at home?" he said.

"No, sir," replied Polly. "He's down the line at present."

The prodigal Rob seemed very much relieved to hear it: though still, in the absorption of all his faculties in his patron, he hardly took his eyes from Mr. Carker's face, unless for a moment at a time to steal a sorrowful glance at his mother.

"Then," said Mr. Carker, "I'll tell you how I have stumbled on this boy of yours, and who I am, and what I am going to do for him."

This Mr. Carker did in his own way: saying that he, at first intended to have accumulated nameless terrors on his presumptuous head, for coming to the whereabouts of Dombey and Son. That he had relented, in consideration of his youth, his professed contrition, and his friends. That he was afraid he took a rash step in doing anything for the boy, and one that might expose him to the censure of the prudent; but that he did it of himself and for himself, and risked the consequences single-handed; and that his mother's past connection with Mr. Dombey's family had nothing to do with it, and that Mr. Dombey had nothing to do with it, but that he, Mr. Carker, was the be-all and the end-all of this business. Taking great credit to himself for his goodness, and receiving no less from all the family then present, Mr. Carker signified, indirectly, but still pretty plainly, that Rob's implicit fidelity, attachment, and devotion were for evermore his due, and the least homage he could receive. And with this great truth Rob himself was so impressed, that, standing gazing on his patron with tears rolling down his cheeks, he nodded his shiny head until it seemed almost as loose as it had done under the same patron's hands that morning.

Polly, who had passed Heaven knows how

many sleepless nights on account of this her dissipated first-born, and had not seen him for weeks and weeks, could have almost knelt to Mr. Carker the manager, as to a good spirit—in spite of his teeth. But Mr. Carker rising to depart, she only thanked him with her mother's prayers and blessings; thanks so rich, when paid out of the heart's mint, especially for any service Mr. Carker had rendered, that he might have given back a large amount of change, and yet been overpaid.

As that gentleman made his way among the crowding children to the door, Rob retreated on his mother, and took her and the baby in the same repentant hug.

"I'll try hard, dear mother, now. Upon my soul I will!" said Rob.

"Oh, do, my dear boy! I am sure you will, for our sakes and your own!" cried Polly, kissing him. "But you're coming back to speak to me; when you have seen the gentleman away?"

"I don't know, mother." Rob hesitated, and looked down. "Father—when's he coming home?"

"Not till two o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I'll come back, mother dear!" cried Rob. And passing through the shrill cry of his brothers and sisters in reception of this promise, he followed Mr. Carker out.

"What!" said Mr. Carker, who had heard this. "You have a bad father, have you?"

"No, sir!" returned Rob, amazed. "There ain't a better nor a kinder father going than mine is."

"Why don't you want to see him, then?" inquired his patron.

"There's such a difference between a father and a mother, sir," said Rob after faltering for a moment. "He couldn't hardly believe yet that I was going to do better—though I know he'd try to—but a mother—*she* always believes what's good, sir; at least, I know my mother does, God bless her!"

Mr. Carker's mouth expanded, but he said no more until he was mounted on his horse, and had dismissed the man who held it, when, looking down from the saddle steadily into the attentive and watchful face of the boy, he said:

"You'll come to me to-morrow morning, and you shall be shown where that old gentleman lives; that old gentleman who was with me this morning; where you are going, as you heard me say."

"Yes, sir," returned Rob.

"I have a great interest in that old gentleman, and, in serving him, you serve me, boy, do you understand? Well," he added, interrupting him,

for he saw his round face brighten when he was told that; "I see you do. I want to know all about that old gentleman, and how he goes on from day to day—for I am anxious to be of service to him—and especially who comes there to see him. Do you understand?"

Rob nodded his steadfast face, and said, "Yes, sir," again.

"I should like to know that he has friends who are attentive to him, and that they don't desert him—for he lives very much alone now, poor fellow; but that they are fond of him, and of his nephew who has gone abroad. There is a very young lady who may perhaps come to see him. I want particularly to know all about *her*."

"I'll take care, sir," said the boy.

"And take care," returned his patron, bending forward to advance his grinning face closer to the boy's, and pat him on the shoulder with the handle of his whip: "take care you talk about affairs of mine to nobody but me."

"To nobody in the world, sir," replied Rob, shaking his head.

"Neither there," said Mr. Carker, pointing to the place they had just left, "nor anywhere else. I'll try how true and grateful you can be. I'll prove you!" Making this, by his display of teeth and by the action of his head, as much a threat as a promise, he turned from Rob's eyes, which were nailed upon him as if he had won the boy by a charm, body and soul, and rode away. But again becoming conscious, after trotting a short distance, that his devoted henchman, girt as before, was yielding him the same attendance, to the great amusement of sundry spectators, he reined up, and ordered him off. To insure his obedience, he turned in the saddle and watched him as he retired. It was curious to see that even then Rob could not keep his eyes wholly averted from his patron's face, but, constantly turning and turning again to look after him, involved himself in a tempest of buffetings and jostlings from the other passengers in the street: of which, in the pursuit of the one paramount idea, he was perfectly heedless.

Mr. Carker the manager rode on at a footpace, with the easy air of one who had performed all the business of the day in a satisfactory manner, and got it comfortably off his mind. Complacent and affable as man could be, Mr. Carker picked his way along the streets, and hummed a soft tune as he went. He seemed to purr; he was so glad.

And in some sort, Mr. Carker, in his fancy, basked upon a hearth, too. Coiled up snugly at certain feet, he was ready for a spring, or for a tear, or for a scratch, or for a velvet touch, as

DOMBEY AND SON, II.

the humour took him and occasion served. Was there any bird in a cage that came in for a share of his regards?

"A very young lady!" thought Mr. Carker the manager, through his song. "Ay! when I saw her last, she was a little child. With dark eyes and hair, I recollect, and a good face; a very good face! I dare say she's pretty."

More affable and pleasant yet, and humming his song until his many teeth vibrated to it, Mr. Carker picked his way along, and turned at last into the shady street where Mr. Dombey's house stood. He had been so busy, winding webs round good faces, and obscuring them with meshes, that he hardly thought of being at this point of his ride, until glancing down the cold perspective of tall houses, he reined in his horse quickly within a few yards of the door. But to explain why Mr. Carker reined in his horse quickly, and what he looked at in no small surprise, a few digressive words are necessary.

Mr. Toots, emancipated from the Blimber thralldom, and coming into the possession of a certain portion of his worldly wealth, "which," as he had been wont, during his last half-year's probation, to communicate to Mr. Feeder every evening as a new discovery, "the executors couldn't keep him out of," had applied himself, with great diligence, to the science of Life. Fired with a noble emulation to pursue a brilliant and distinguished career, Mr. Toots had furnished a choice set of apartments; had established among them a sporting bower, embellished with the portraits of winning horses, in which he took no particle of interest; and a divan, which made him poorly. In this delicious abode Mr. Toots devoted himself to the cultivation of those gentle arts which refine and humanise existence, his chief instructor in which was an interesting character called the Game Chicken, who was always to be heard of at the bar of the Black Badger, wore a shaggy white great-coat in the warmest weather, and knocked Mr. Toots about the head three times a week, for the small consideration of ten-and-six per visit.

The Game Chicken, who was quite the Apollo of Mr. Toots's Pantheon, had introduced to him a marker who taught billiards, a Life Guard who taught fencing, a job-master who taught riding, a Cornish gentleman who was up to anything in the athletic line, and two or three other friends connected no less intimately with the fine arts. Under whose auspices Mr. Toots could hardly fail to improve apace, and under whose tuition he went to work.

But, however it came about, it came to pass,

even while these gentlemen had the gloss of novelty upon them, that Mr. Toots felt, he didn't know how, unsettled and uneasy. There were husks in his corn, that even Game Chickens, couldn't peck up; gloomy giants in his leisure, that even Game Chickens couldn't knock down. Nothing seemed to do Mr. Toots so much good as incessantly leaving cards at Mr. Dombey's door. No tax-gatherer in the British dominions—that widespread territory on which the sun never sets, and where the tax-gatherer never goes to bed—was more regular and persevering in his calls than Mr. Toots.

Mr. Toots never went up-stairs; and always performed the same ceremonies, richly dressed for the purpose, at the hall-door.

"Oh! Good morning!" would be Mr. Toots's first remark to the servant. "For Mr. Dombey," would be Mr. Toots's next remark, as he handed in a card. "For Miss Dombey," would be his next, as he handed in another.

Mr. Toots would then turn round as if to go away; but the man knew him by this time, and knew he wouldn't.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Mr. Toots would say, as if a thought had suddenly descended on him. "Is the young woman at home?"

The man would rather think she was, but wouldn't quite know. Then he would ring a bell that rang up-stairs, and would look up the staircase, and would say, Yes, she *was* at home, and was coming down. Then Miss Nipper would appear, and the man would retire.

"Oh! How de do?" Mr. Toots would say, with a chuckle and a blush.

Susan would thank him, and say she was very well.

"How's Diogenes going on?" would be Mr. Toots's second interrogation.

Very well indeed. Miss Florence was fonder and fonder of him every day. Mr. Toots was sure to hail this with a burst of chuckles, like the opening of a bottle of some effervescent beverage.

"Miss Florence is quite well, sir," Susan would add.

"Oh, it's of no consequence, thankée," was the invariable reply of Toots; and, when he had said so, he always went away very fast.

Now, it is certain that Mr. Toots had a filmy something in his mind, which led him to conclude that if he could aspire successfully, in the fulness of time, to the hand of Florence, he would be fortunate and blessed. It is certain that Mr. Toots, by some remote and roundabout road, had got to that point, and that there he made a stand. His heart was wounded; he was

touched; he was in love. He had made a desperate attempt one night, and had sat up all night for the purpose, to write an acrostic on Florence, which affected him to tears in the conception. But he never proceeded in the execution further than the words, "For when I gaze"—the flow of imagination in which he had previously written down the initial letters of the other seven lines deserting him at that point.

Beyond devising that very artful and politic measure of leaving a card for Mr. Dombey daily, the brain of Mr. Toots had not worked much in reference to the subject that held his feelings prisoner. But deep consideration at length assured Mr. Toots that an important step to gain was the conciliation of Miss Susan Nipper, preparatory to giving her some inkling of his state of mind.

A little light and playful gallantry towards this lady seemed the means to employ, in that early chapter of the history, for winning her to his interests. Not being able quite, to make up his mind about it, he consulted the Chicken—without taking that gentleman into his confidence; merely informing him that a friend in Yorkshire had written to him (Mr. Toots) for his opinion on such a question. The Chicken replying that his opinion always was, "Go in and win," and further, "When your man's before you, and your work cut out, go in and do it," Mr. Toots considered this a figurative way of supporting his own view of the case, and heroically resolved to kiss Miss Nipper next day.

Upon the next day, therefore, Mr. Toots, putting into requisition some of the greatest marvels that Burgess and Co. had ever turned out, went off to Mr. Dombey's upon this design. But his heart failed him so much as he approached the scene of action, that, although he arrived on the ground at three o'clock in the afternoon, it was six before he knocked at the door.

Everything happened as usual, down to the point when Susan said her young mistress was well, and Mr. Toots said it was of no consequence. To her amazement, Mr. Toots, instead of going off like a rocket, after that observation, lingered and chuckled.

"Perhaps you'd like to walk up-stairs, s?" said Susan.

"Well I think I will come in!" said Mr. Toots.

But, instead of walking up-stairs, the bold Toots made an awkward plunge at Susan when the door was shut, and embracing that fair creature, kissed her on the cheek.

"Go along with you!" cried Susan, "or I'll tear your eyes out."

"Just another!" said Mr. Toots.

"Go along with you!" exclaimed Susan, giving him a push. "Innocents like you, too! Who'll begin next? Go along, sir!"

Susan was not in any serious strait, for she could hardly speak for laughing; but Diogenes, on the staircase, hearing a rustling against the wall, and a shuffling of feet, and seeing through the banisters that there was some contention going on, and foreign invasion in the house, formed a different opinion, dashed down to the rescue, and in the twinkling of an eye had Mr. Toots by the leg.

Susan screamed, laughed, opened the street-door, and ran down-stairs; the bold Toots tumbled staggering out into the street, with Diogenes holding on to one leg of his pantaloons, as if Burgess and Co. were his cooks, and had provided that dainty morsel for his holiday entertainment; Diogenes, shaken off, rolled over and over in the dust, got up again, whirled round the giddy Toots, and snapped at him: and all this turmoil, Mr. Carker, reining up his horse and sitting a little at a distance, saw, to his amazement, issue from the stately house of Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Carker remained watching the discomfited Toots, when Diogenes was called in, and the door shut: and while that gentleman, taking refuge in a doorway near at hand, bound up the torn leg of his pantaloons with a costly silk handkerchief that had formed part of his expensive outfit for the adventure.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Carker, riding up, with his most propitiatory smile. "I hope you are not hurt?"

"Oh no, thank you," replied Mr. Toots, raising his flushed face; "it's of no consequence." Mr. Toots would have signified, if he could, that he liked it very much.

"If the dog's teeth have entered the leg, sir—" began Carker, with a display of his own.

"No, thank you," said Mr. Toots; "it's all quite right. It's very comfortable, thank you."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Dombey," observed Carker.

"Have you though?" rejoined the blushing Toots.

"And you will allow me, perhaps, to apologise, in his absence," said Mr. Carker, taking off his hat, "for such a misadventure, and to wonder how it can possibly have happened."

Mr. Toots is so much gratified by this politeness, and the lucky chance of making friends with a friend of Mr. Dombey, that he pulls out his card-case, which he never loses an opportunity of using, and hands his name and address

to Mr. Carker: who responds to that courtesy by giving him his own, and with that they part.

As Mr. Carker picks his way so softly past the house, glancing up at the windows, and trying to make out the pensive face behind the curtain, looking at the children opposite, the rough head of Diogenes came clambering up close by it, and the dog, regardless of all soothing, barks and growls, and makes at him from that height, as if he would spring down and tear him limb from limb.

Well spoken, Di, so near your mistress!

Another, and another, with your head up, your eyes flashing, and your vexed mouth worrying itself for want of him! Another, as he picks his way along! You have a good scent, Di,—cats, boy, cats!

CHAPTER XXIII.

FLORENCE SOLITARY, AND THE MIDSHIPMAN MYSTERIOUS.



FLORENCE lived alone in the great dreary house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone; and the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

No magic dwelling-place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy than was her father's mansion in its grim reality, as it stood lowering on the street: always by night, when lights were shining from neighbouring windows, a blot upon its scanty brightness; always by day a frown upon its never-smiling face.

There were not two dragon sentries keeping ward before the gate of this abode, as in magic legend are usually found on duty over the wronged innocence imprisoned: but besides a glowering visage, with its thin lips parted wickedly, that surveyed all comers from above the archway of the door, there was a monstrous fantasy of rusty iron curling and twisting like a petrification of an arbour over the threshold, budding in spikes and cork-screw points, and bearing, one on either side, two ominous extinguishers, that seemed to say, "Who enter here, leave light behind!" There were no talismanic characters engraven on the portal, but the house was now so neglected in appearance, that boys chalked the railings and the pavement—particularly round the corner where the side wall was—and drew ghosts on the stable-door; and,

being sometimes driven off by Mr. Towlinson, made portraits of him, in return, with his ears growing out horizontally from under his hat. Noise ceased to be, within the shadow of the roof. The brass band that came into the street once a week, in the morning, never brayed a note in at those windows: but all such company, down to a poor little piping organ of weak intellect, with an imbecile party of automaton dancers waltzing in and out at folding doors, fell off from it with one accord, and shunned it as a hopeless place.

The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired.

The passive desolation of disuse was everywhere silently manifest about it. Within doors, curtains, drooping heavily, lost their old folds and shapes, and hung like cumbrous palls. Hecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up, shrunk like imprisoned and forgotten men, and changed insensibly. Mirrors were dim as with the breath of years. Patterns of carpets faded, and became perplexed and faint, like the memory of those years' trifling incidents. Boards, starting at unwonted footsteps, creaked and shook. Keys rusted in the locks of doors. Damp started on the walls, and, as the stains came out, the pictures seemed to go in and secrete themselves. Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets. Fungus-trees grew in corners of the cellars. Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence nor how; spiders, moths, and grubs were heard of every day. An exploratory black-beetle now and then was found immovable upon the stairs, or in an upper room, as wondering how he got there. Rats began to squeak and scuffle in the night-time, through dark galleries they mined behind the panelling.

The dreary magnificence of the state rooms, seen imperfectly by the doubtful light admitted through closed shutters, would have answered well enough for an enchanted abode. Such as the tarnished paws of gilded lions, stealthily put out from beneath their wrappers; the marble lineaments of busts on pedestals, fearfully revealing themselves through veils; the clocks that never told the time, or, if wound up by any chance, told it wrong, and struck unearthly numbers, which are not upon the dial; the accidental tinklings among the pendent lustres, more startling than alarm bells; the softened sounds and laggard air that made their way among these objects, and a phantom crowd of others, shrouded and hooded, and made spectral of shape. But, besides, there was the great staircase, where the

lord of the place so rarely set his foot, and by which his little child had gone up to Heaven. There were other staircases and passages where no one went for weeks together; there were two closed rooms associated with dead members of the family, and with whispered recollections of them; and, to all the house but Florence, there was a gentle figure moving through the solitude and gloom, that gave to every lifeless thing a touch of present human interest and wonder.

For Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the cold walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

The grass began to grow upon the roof, and in the crevices of the basement paving. A scaly, crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills. Fragments of mortar lost their hold upon the insides of the unused chimneys, and came dropping down. The two trees with the smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves. Through the whole building, white had turned yellow, yellow nearly black; and, since the time when the poor lady died, it had slowly become a dark gap in the long monotonous street.

But Florence bloomed there, like the king's fair daughter in the story. Her books, her music, and her daily teachers were her only real companions, Susan Nipper and Diogenes excepted: of whom the former, in her attendance on the studies of her young mistress, began to grow quite learned herself, while the latter, softened possibly by the same influences, would lay his head upon the window-ledge, and placidly open and shut his eyes upon the street, all through a summer morning; sometimes pricking up his head to look with great significance after some noisy dog in a cart, who was barking his way along, and sometimes, with an exasperated and unaccountable recollection of his supposed enemy in the neighbourhood, rushing to the door, whence, after a deafening disturbance, he would come jogging back with a ridiculous complacency that belonged to him, and lay his jaw upon the window-ledge again, with the air of a dog who had done a public service.

So Florence lived in her wilderness of a home, within the circle of her innocent pursuits and thoughts, and nothing harmed her. She could go down to her father's rooms now, and think of him, and suffer her loving heart humbly to approach him, without fear of repulse. She could look upon the objects that had surrounded him in his sorrow, and could nestle near his chair,

and not dread the glance that she so well remembered. She could render him such little tokens of her duty and service as putting everything in order for him with her own hands, binding little nosegays for his table, changing them as one by one they withered and he did not come back, preparing something for him every day, and leaving some timid mark of her presence near his usual seat. To-day it was a little painted stand for his watch; to-morrow she would be afraid to leave it, and would substitute some other trifle of her making not so likely to attract his eye. Waking in the night, perhaps, she would tremble at the thought of his coming home and angrily rejecting it, and would hurry down with slipped feet and quickly-beating heart, and bring it away. At another time she would only lay her face upon his desk, and leave a kiss there, and a tear.

Still no one knew of this. Unless the household found it out when she was not there—and they all held Mr. Dombey's rooms in awe—it was as deep a secret in her breast as what had gone before it. Florence stole into those rooms at twilight, early in the morning, and at times when meals were served down-stairs. And, although they were in every nook the better and the brighter for her care, she entered and passed out as quietly as any sunbeam, excepting that she left her light behind.

Shadowy company attended Florence up and down the echoing house, and sat with her in the dismantled rooms. As if her life were an enchanted vision, there arose out of her solitude ministering thoughts, that made it fanciful and unreal. She imagined so often what her life would have been if her father could have loved her, and she had been a favourite child, that sometimes, for the moment, she almost believed it was so, and, borne on by the current of that pensive fiction, seemed to remember how they had watched her brother in his grave together; how they had freely shared his heart between them; how they were united in the dear remembrance of him; how they often spoke about him yet; and her kind father, looking at her gently, told her of their common hope and trust in God. At other times she pictured to herself her mother yet alive. And oh, the happiness of falling on her neck, and clinging to her with the love and confidence of all her soul! And oh, the desolation of the solitary house again, with evening coming on, and no one there!

But there was one thought, scarcely shaped out to herself, yet fervent and strong within her, that upheld Florence when she strove, and filled her true young heart, so sorely tried, with con-

stancy of purpose. Into her mind, as into all others contending with the great affliction of our mortal nature, there had stolen solemn wonderings and hopes, arising in the dim world beyond the present life, and murmuring, like faint music, of recognition in the far-off land between her brother and her mother: of some present consciousness in both of her: some love and commiseration for her: and some knowledge of her as she went her way upon the earth. It was a soothing consolation to Florence to give shelter to these thoughts, until one day—it was soon after she had last seen her father in his own room, late at night—the fancy came upon her, that, in weeping for his alienated heart, she might stir the spirits of the dead against him. Wild, weak, childish as it may have been to think so, and to tremble at the half-formed thought, it was the impulse of her loving nature; and from that hour Florence strove against the cruel wound in her breast, and tried to think of him whose hand had made it only with hope.

Her father did not know—she held to it from that time—how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him. She would be patient, and would try to gain that art in time, and win him to a better knowledge of his only child.

This became the purpose of her life. The morning sun shone down upon the faded house, and found the resolution bright and fresh within the bosom of its solitary mistress. Through all the duties of the day it animated her; for Florence hoped that the more she knew, and the more accomplished she became, the more glad he would be when he came to know and like her. Sometimes she wondered, with a swelling heart and rising tear, whether she was proficient enough in anything to surprise him when they should become companions. Sometimes she tried to think if there were any kind of knowledge that would bespeak his interest more readily than another. Always: at her books, her music, and her work: in her morning walks, and in her nightly prayers: she had her engrossing aim in view. Strange study for a child, to learn the road to a hard parent's heart.

There were many careless loungers through the street, as the summer evening deepened into night, who glanced across the road at the sombre house, and saw the youthful figure at the window, such a contrast to it, looking upward at the stars as they began to shine, who would have slept the worse if they had known on what design she mused so steadfastly. The reputation

of the mansion as a haunted house would not have been the gayer with some humble dwellers elsewhere, who were struck by its external gloom in passing and repassing on their daily avocations, and so named it, if they could have read its story in the darkening face. But Florence held her sacred purpose, unsuspected and unaided: and studied only how to bring her father to the understanding that she loved him, and made no appeal against him in any wandering thought.

Thus Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the monotonous walls looked down upon her with a stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like intent to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

Susan Nipper stood opposite to her young mistress, one morning, as she folded and sealed a note she had been writing: and showed in her looks an approving knowledge of its contents.

"Better late than never, dear Miss Floy," said Susan, "and I do say, that even a visit to them old Skettleses will be a godsend."

"It is very good of Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, Susan," returned Florence, with a mild correction of that young lady's familiar mention of the family in question, "to repeat their invitation so kindly."

Miss Nipper, who was perhaps the most thorough-going partisan on the face of the earth, and who carried her partisanship into all matters, great or small, and perpetually waged war with it against society, screwed up her lips and shook her head, as a protest against any recognition of disinterestedness in the Skettleses, and a plea in bar that they would have valuable consideration for their kindness in the company of Florence.

"They know what they're about, if ever people did," murmured Miss Nipper, drawing in her breath, "oh! trust them Skettleses for that!"

"I am not very anxious to go to Fulham, Susan, I confess," said Florence thoughtfully; "but it will be right to go. I think it will be better."

"Much better," interposed Susan, with another emphatic shake of her head.

"And so," said Florence, "though I would prefer to have gone when there was no one there, instead of in this vacation-time, when it seems there are some young people staying in the house, I have thankfully said yes."

"For which I say, Miss Floy, Oh be joyful!" returned Susan. "Ah! h—h!"

This last ejaculation, with which Miss Nipper frequently wound up a sentence at about that epoch of time, was supposed, below the level of

the hall, to have a general reference to Mr. Dombey, and to be expressive of a yearning in Miss Nipper to favour that gentleman with a piece of her mind. But she never explained it; and it had, in consequence, the charm of mystery, in addition to the advantage of the sharpest expression.

"How long it is before we have any news of Walter, Susan!" observed Florence after a moment's silence.

"Long indeed, Miss Floy!" replied her maid. "And Perch said, when he came just now to see for letters—but what signifies what *he* says?" exclaimed Susan, reddening and breaking off. "Much *he* knows about it!"

Florence raised her eyes quickly, and a flush overspread her face.

"If I hadn't," said Susan Nipper, evidently struggling with some latent anxiety and alarm, and looking full at her young mistress, while endeavouring to work herself into a state of resentment with the unoffending Mr. Perch's image, "if I hadn't more manliness than that insipidist of his sex, I'd never take pride in my hair again, but turn it up behind my ears, and wear coarse caps, without a bit of border, until death released me from my insignificance, I may not be a Amazon, Miss Floy, and wouldn't so demean myself by such disfigurement, but anyways I'm not a giver up, I hope."

"Give up! What?" cried Florence, with a face of terror.

"Why, nothing, miss," said Susan. "Good gracious, nothing! It's only that wet curl-paper of a man Perch, that any one might almost make away with, with a touch, and really it would be a blessed event for all parties if some one *would* take pity on him, and would have the goodness!"

"Does he give up the ship, Susan?" inquired Florence, very pale.

"No, miss," returned Susan; "I should like to see him make so bold as to do it to my face! No, miss, but he goes on about some bothering ginger that Mr. Walter was to send to Mrs. Perch, and shakes his dismal head, and says he hopes it may be coming; anyhow, he says, it can't come now in time for the intended occasion, but may do for next, which really," said Miss Nipper, with aggravated scorn, "puts me out of patience with the man, for though I can bear a great deal, I am not a camel, neither am I," added Susan, after a moment's consideration, "if I know myself, a dromedary neither."

"What else does he say, Susan?" inquired Florence earnestly. "Won't you tell me?"

"As if I wouldn't tell you anything, Miss Floy, and everything!" said Susan. "Why, miss, he

says that there begins to be a general talk about the ship, and that they have never had a ship on that voyage half so long unheard of, and that the captain's wife was at the office yesterday, and seemed a little put out about it, but any one could say that, we knew nearly that before."

"I must visit Walter's uncle," said Florence hurriedly, "before I leave home. I will go and see him this morning. Let us walk there directly, Susan."

Miss Nipper having nothing to urge against the proposal, but being perfectly acquiescent, they were soon equipped, and in the streets, and on their way towards the little Midshipman.

The state of mind in which poor Walter had gone to Captain Cuttle's on the day when Brogley the broker came into possession, and when there seemed to him to be an execution in the very steeples, was pretty much the same as that in which Florence now took her way to Uncle Sol's; with this difference, that Florence suffered the added pain of thinking that she had been, perhaps, the innocent occasion of involving Walter in peril, and all to whom he was dear, herself included, in an agony of suspense. For the rest, uncertainty and danger seemed written upon everything. The weather-cocks on spires and housetops were mysterious with hints of stormy wind, and pointed, like so many ghostly fingers, out to dangerous seas, where fragments of great wrecks were drifting, perhaps, and helpless men were rocked upon them into a sleep as deep as the unfathomable waters. When Florence came into the City, and passed gentlemen who were talking together, she dreaded to hear them speaking of the ship, and saying it was lost. Pictures and prints of vessels fighting with the rolling waves filled her with alarm. The smoke and clouds, though moving gently, moved too fast for her apprehensions, and made her fear there was a tempest blowing at that moment on the ocean.

Susan Nipper may or may not have been affected similarly, but having her attention much engaged in struggles with boys, whenever there was any press of people—for, between that grade of humankind and herself there was some natural animosity, that invariably broke out whenever they came together—it would seem that she had not much leisure on the road for intellectual operations.

Arriving in good time abreast of the Wooden Midshipman on the opposite side of the way, and waiting for an opportunity to cross the street, they were a little surprised at first to see, at the instrument-maker's door, a round-headed lad, with his chubby face addressed towards the

sky, who, as they looked at him, suddenly thrust into his capacious mouth two fingers of each hand, and, with the assistance of that machinery, whistled, with astonishing shrillness, to some pigeons at a considerable elevation in the air.

"Mrs. Richards's eldest, miss!" said Susan, "and the worrit of Mrs. Richards's life!"

As Polly had been to tell Florence of the resuscitated prospects of her son and heir, Florence was prepared for the meeting. so, a favourable moment presenting itself, they both hastened across, without any further contemplation of Mrs. Richards's bane. That sporting character, unconscious of their approach, again whistled with his utmost might, and then yelled, in a rapture of excitement, "Strays! Whoo-oo! Strays!" which identification had such an effect upon the conscience-stricken pigeons, that instead of going direct to some town in the north of England, as appeared to have been their original intention, they began to wheel and falter; whereupon Mrs. Richards's first-born pierced them with another whistle, and again yelled, in a voice that rose above the turmoil of the street, "Strays! Whoo-oo! Strays!"

From this transport he was abruptly recalled to terrestrial objects by a poke from Miss Nipper, which sent him into the shop.

"Is this the way you show your penitence, when Mrs. Richards has been fretting for you months and months?" said Susan, following the poke. "Where's Mr. Gills?"

Rob, who smoothed his first rebellious glance at Miss Nipper when he saw Florence following, put his knuckles to his hair, in honour of the latter, and said to the former, that Mr. Gills was out.

"Fetch him home," said Miss Nipper with authority, "and say that my young lady's here."

"I don't know where he's gone," said Rob.

"Is *that* your penitence?" cried Susan with stinging sharpness.

"Why, how can I go and fetch him when I don't know where to go?" whimpered the baited Rob. "How can you be so unreasonable?"

"Did Mr. Gills say when he should be home?" asked Florence.

"Yes, miss," replied Rob, with another application of his knuckles to his hair. "He said he should be home early in the afternoon; in about a couple of hours from now, miss."

"Is he very anxious about his nephew?" inquired Susan.

"Yes, miss," returned Rob, preferring to address himself to Florence, and slighting Nipper; "I should say he was, very much so. He ain't indoors, miss, not a quarter of an hour together.

He can't settle in one place five minutes. He goes about like a—just like a stray," said Rob, stooping to get a glimpse of the pigeons through the window, and checking himself, with his fingers half-way to his mouth, on the verge of another whistle.

"Do you know a friend of Mr. Gills called Captain Cuttle?" inquired Florence after a moment's reflection.

"Him with a hook, miss?" rejoined Rob, with an illustrative twist of his left hand. "Yes, miss. He was here the day before yesterday."

"Has he not been here since?" asked Susan.

"No, miss," returned Rob, still addressing his reply to Florence.

"Perhaps Walter's uncle has gone there, Susan," observed Florence, turning to her.

"To Captain Cuttle's, miss?" interposed Rob. "No, he's not gone there, miss. Because he left particular word that, if Captain Cuttle called, I should tell him how surprised he was not to have seen him yesterday, and should make him stop till he came back."

"Do you know where Captain Cuttle lives?" asked Florence.

Rob replied in the affirmative, and turning to a greasy parchment book on the shop desk, read the address aloud.

Florence again turned to her maid, and took counsel with her in a low voice, while Rob the round-eyed, mindful of his patron's secret charge, looked on and listened. Florence proposed that they should go to Captain Cuttle's house; hear from his own lips what he thought of the absence of any tidings of the Son and Heir; and bring him, if they could, to comfort Uncle Sol. Susan at first objected slightly, on the score of distance; but a hackney coach being mentioned by her mistress, withdrew that opposition, and gave in her assent. There were some minutes of discussion between them before they came to this conclusion, during which the staring Rob paid close attention to both speakers, and inclined his ear to each by turns, as if he were appointed arbitrator of the arguments.

In fine, Rob was dispatched for a coach, the visitors keeping shop meanwhile; and when he brought it, they got into it, leaving word for Uncle Sol that they would be sure to call again on their way back. Rob, having stared after the coach until it was as invisible as the pigeons had now become, sat down behind the desk with a most assiduous demeanour; and, in order that he might forget nothing of what had transpired, made notes of it on various small scraps of paper, with a vast expenditure of ink. There was no danger of these documents betraying

anything, if accidentally lost; for, long before a word was dry, it became as profound a mystery to Rob as if he had had no part whatever in its production.

While he was yet busy with these labours, the hackney coach, after encountering unheard-of difficulties from swivel-bridges, soft roads, impassable canals, caravans of casks, settlements of scarlet-beans, and little wash-houses, and many such obstacles abounding in that country, stopped at the corner of Brig Place. Alighting here, Florence and Susan Nipper walked down the street, and sought out the abode of Captain Cuttle.

It happened by evil-chance to be one of Mrs. MacStinger's great cleaning days. On these occasions Mrs. MacStinger was knocked up by the policeman at a quarter before three in the morning, and rarely succumbed before twelve o'clock next night. The chief object of this institution appeared to be, that Mrs. MacStinger should move all the furniture into the back-garden at early dawn, walk about the house in pattens all day, and move the furniture back again after dark. These ceremonies greatly fluttered those doves the young MacStingers, who were not only unable at such times to find any resting-place for the soles of their feet, but generally came in for a good deal of pecking from the maternal bird during the progress of the solemnities.

At the moment when Florence and Susan Nipper presented themselves at Mrs. MacStinger's door, that worthy but redoubtable female was in the act of conveying Alexander MacStinger, aged two years and three months, along the passage for forcible deposition in a sitting posture on the street pavement; Alexander being black in the face with holding his breath after punishment, and a cool paving-stone being usually found to act as a powerful restorative in such cases.

The feelings of Mrs. MacStinger, as a woman and a mother, were outraged by the look of pity for Alexander which she observed in Florence's face. Therefore, Mrs. MacStinger asserting those finest emotions of our nature, in preference to weakly gratifying her curiosity, shook and buffeted Alexander, both before and during the application of the paving-stone, and took no further notice of the strangers.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Florence, when the child had found his breath again, and was using it. "Is this Captain Cuttle's house?"

"No," said Mrs. MacStinger.

"Not Number Nine?" asked Florence, hesitating.

"Who said it wasn't Number Nine?" said Mrs. MacStinger.

Susan Nipper instantly struck in, and begged to inquire what Mrs. MacStinger meant by that, and if she knew whom she was talking to.

Mrs. MacStinger, in retort, looked at her all over. "What do *you* want with Captain Cuttle, I should wish to know?" said Mrs. MacStinger.

"Should you? Then I'm sorry that you won't be satisfied," returned Miss Nipper.

"Hush, Susan! If you please!" said Florence. "Perhaps you can have the goodness to tell us where Captain Cuttle lives, ma'am, as he don't live here."

"Who says he don't live here?" retorted the implacable MacStinger. "I said it wasn't Cap'en Cuttle's house—and it an't his house—



"WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH CAPTAIN CUTTLE, I SHOULD WISH TO KNOW?" SAID MRS. MACSTINGER.
 "SHOULD YOU? THEN I'M SORRY THAT YOU WON'T BE SATISFIED," RETURNED MISS NIPPER.

and forbid it that it ever should be his house—for Cap'en Cuttle don't know how to keep a house—and don't deserve to have a house—it's *my* house—and when I let the upper floor to Cap'en Cuttle, oh, I do a thankless thing, and cast pearls before swine!"

Mrs. MacStinger pitched her voice for the upper windows in offering these remarks, and cracked off each clause sharply by itself, as if from a rifle possessing an infinity of barrels. After the last shot, the captain's voice was heard to say, in feeble remonstrance from his own room, "Steady below!"

"Since you want Cap'en Cuttle, there he is!" said Mrs. MacStinger, with an angry motion of her hand. On Florence making bold to enter without any more parley, and on Susan following, Mrs. MacStinger recommenced her pedestrian exercise in pattens, and Alexander MacStinger (still on the paving-stone), who had stopped in his crying to attend to the conversation, began to wail again, entertaining himself during that dismal performance, which was quite mechanical, with a general survey of the prospect, terminating in the hackney coach.

The captain in his own apartment was sitting with his hands in his pockets, and his legs drawn up under his chair, on a very small desolate island, lying about midway in an ocean of soap-and-water. The captain's windows had been cleaned, the walls had been cleaned, the stove had been cleaned, and everything, the stove excepted, was wet, and shining with soft soap and sand: the smell of which dry-saltetry impregnated the air. In the midst of the dreary scene, the captain, cast away upon his island, looked round on the waste of waters with a rueful countenance, and seemed waiting for some friendly bark to come that way, and take him off.

But when the captain, directing his forlorn visage towards the door, saw Florence appear with her maid, no words can describe his astonishment. Mrs. MacStinger's eloquence having rendered all other sounds but imperfectly distinguishable, he had looked for no rarer visitor than the potboy or the milkman; wherefore, when Florence appeared, and, coming to the confines of the island, put her hand in his, the captain stood up, aghast, as if he supposed her, for the moment, to be some young member of the Flying Dutchman's family.

Instantly recovering his self-possession, however, the captain's first care was to place her on dry land, which he happily accomplished with one motion of his arm. Issuing forth, then, upon the main, Captain Cuttle took Miss Nipper round the waist, and bore her to the island also. Captain Cuttle, then, with great respect and admiration, raised the hand of Florence to his lips, and standing off a little (for the island was not large enough for three), beamed on her from the soap-and-water like a new description of Triton.

"You are amazed to see us, I am sure," said Florence with a smile.

The inexpressibly gratified captain kissed his hook in reply, and growled, as if a choice and delicate compliment were included in the words, "Stand by! Stand by!"

"But I couldn't rest," said Florence, "without coming to ask you what you think about dear Walter—who is my brother now—and whether there is anything to fear, and whether you will not go and console his poor uncle every day, until we have some intelligence of him?"

At these words Captain Cuttle, as by an involuntary gesture, clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited.

"Have you any fears for Walter's safety?"

inquired Florence, from whose face the captain (so enraptured he was with it) could not take his eyes: while she, in her turn, looked earnestly at him, to be assured of the sincerity of his reply.

"No, Heart's Delight," said Captain Cuttle, "I am not afeard. Wal'r is a lad as'll go through a deal o' hard weather. Wal'r is a lad as'll bring as much success to that 'ere brig as a lad is capable on: Wal'r," said the captain, his eyes glistening with the praise of his young friend, and his hook raised to announce a beautiful quotation, "is what you may call a out'ard and visible sign of a in'ard and spirited grasp, and when found, make a note of."

Florence, who did not quite understand this, though the captain evidently thought it full of meaning, and highly satisfactory, mildly looked to him for something more.

"I am not afeard, my Heart's Delight," resumed the captain. "There's been most uncommon bad weather in them latitudes, there's no denyin', and they have drove and drove, and been beat off, maybe t'other side the world. But the ship's a good ship, and the lad's a good lad; and it ain't easy, thank the Lord," the captain made a little bow, "to break up hearts of oak, whether they're in brigs or buzzums. Here we have 'em both ways, which is bringing it up with a round turn, and so I ain't a bit afeard as yet."

"As yet?" repeated Florence.

"Not a bit," returned the captain, kissing his iron hand; "and afore I begin to be, my Heart's Delight, Wal'r will have wrote home from the island, or from some port or another, and made all taut and ship-shape. And with regard to old Sol Gills," here the captain became solemn, "who I'll stand by, and not desert until death doe us part, and when the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow—overhaul the catechism," said the captain parenthetically, "and there you'll find them expressions—if it would console Sol Gills to have the opinion of a seafaring man as has got a mind equal to any undertaking that he puts it alongside of, and as was all but smashed in his 'prenticeship, and of which the name is Bunsby, that 'ere man shall give him such an opinion in his own parlour as'll stun him. Ah!" said Captain Cuttle vauntingly, "as much as if he'd gone and knocked his head again a door!"

"Let us take this gentleman to see him, and let us hear what he says," cried Florence. "Will you go with us now? We have a coach here."

Again the captain clapped his hand to his

head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited. But at this instant a most remarkable phenomenon occurred. The door opening without any note of preparation, and apparently of itself, the hard glazed hat in question skimmed into the room like a bird, and alighted heavily at the captain's feet. The door then shut as violently as it had opened, and nothing ensued in explanation of the prodigy.

Captain Cuttle picked up his hat, and, having turned it over with a look of interest and welcome, began to polish it on his sleeve. While doing so, the captain eyed his visitors intently, and said in a low voice :

"You see I should have bore down on Sol Gills yesterday, and this morning; but she—she took it away and kept it. That's the long and short of the subject."

"Who did, for goodness' sake?" asked Susan Nipper.

"The lady of the house, my dear," returned the captain in a gruff whisper, and making signals of secrecy. "We had some words about the swabbing of these here planks, and she—in short," said the captain, eyeing the door, and relieving himself with a long breath, "she stopped my liberty."

"Oh! I wish she had me to deal with!" said Susan, reddening with the energy of the wish. "I'd stop her!"

"Would you, do you think, my dear?" rejoined the captain, shaking his head doubtfully, but regarding the desperate courage of the fair aspirant with obvious admiration. "I don't know. It's difficult navigation. She's very hard to carry on with, my dear. You never can tell how she'll head, you see. She's full one minute, and round upon you next. And when she *is* a Tartar," said the captain, with the perspiration breaking out upon his forehead— "There was nothing but a whistle emphatic enough for the conclusion of the sentence, so the captain whistled tremulously. After which he again shook his head, and recurring to his admiration of Miss Nipper's devoted bravery, timidly repeated, "Would you, do you think, my dear?"

Susan only replied with a bridling smile, but that was so very full of defiance, that there is no knowing how long Captain Cuttle might have stood entranced in its contemplation, if Florence in her anxiety had not again proposed their immediately resorting to the oracular Bunsby. Thus reminded of his duty, Captain Cuttle put on the glazed hat firmly, took up another knobby stick, with which he had supplied the place of that one given to Walter,

and offering his arm to Florence, prepared to cut his way through the enemy.

It turned out, however, that Mrs. MacStinger had already changed her course, and that she headed, as the captain had remarked she often did, in quite a new direction. For, when they got down-stairs, they found that exemplary woman beating the mats on the door-steps, with Alexander, still upon the paving-stone, dimly looming through a fog of dust; and so absorbed was Mrs. MacStinger in her household occupation, that when Captain Cuttle and his visitors passed, she beat the harder, and neither by word nor gesture showed any consciousness of their vicinity. The captain was so well pleased with this easy escape—although the effect of the door-mats on him was like a copious administration of snuff, and made him sneeze until the tears ran down his face—that he could hardly believe his good fortune; but more than once, between the door and the hackney coach, looked over his shoulder, with an obvious apprehension of Mrs. MacStinger's giving chase yet.

However, they got to the corner of Brig Place without any molestation from that terrible fire-ship; and the captain mounting the coach-box—for his gallantry would not allow him to ride inside with the ladies, though besought to do so—piloted the driver on his course for Captain Bunsby's vessel, which was called the Cautious Clara, and was lying hard by Ratcliff.

Arrived at the wharf off which this great commander's ship was jammed in among some five hundred companions, whose tangled rigging looked like monstrous cobwebs half swept down, Captain Cuttle appeared at the coach window, and invited Florence and Miss Nipper to accompany him on board; observing that Bunsby was to the last degree soft-hearted in respect of ladies, and that nothing would so much tend to bring his expansive intellect into a state of harmony as their presentation to the Cautious Clara.

Florence readily consented; and the captain, taking her little hand in his prodigious palm, led her, with a mixed expression of patronage, paternity, pride, and ceremony, that was pleasant to see, over several very dirty decks, until, coming to the Clara, they found that cautious craft (which lay outside the tier) with her gangway removed, and half-a-dozen feet of river interposed between herself and her nearest neighbour. It appeared, from Captain Cuttle's explanation, that the great Bunsby, like himself, was cruelly treated by his landlady, and that when her usage of him for the time being was

so hard that he could bear it no longer, he set this gulf between them as a last resource.

"Clara a-hoy!" cried the captain, putting a hand to each side of his mouth.

"A-hoy!" cried a boy, like the captain's echo, tumbling up from below.

"Bunsby aboard?" cried the captain, hailing the boy in a stentorian voice, as if he were half a mile off instead of two yards.

"Ay, ay!" cried the boy in the same tone.

The boy then shoved out a plank to Captain Cuttle, who adjusted it carefully, and led Florence across: returning presently for Miss Nipper. So they stood upon the deck of the Cautious Clara, in whose standing rigging divers fluttering articles of dress were curing, in company, with a few tongues and some mackerel.

Immediately there appeared, coming slowly up above the bulk-head of the cabin, another bulk-head—human and very large—with one stationary eye in the mahogany face, and one revolving one, on the principle of some light-houses. This head was decorated with shaggy hair, like oakum, which had no governing inclination towards the north, east, west, or south, but inclined to all four quarters of the compass, and to every point upon it. The head was followed by a perfect desert of chin, and by a shirt collar and neckerchief, and by a dreadnought pilot coat, and by a pair of dreadnought pilot trousers, whereof the waistband was so very broad and high, that it became a succedaneum for a waistcoat: being ornamented, near the wearer's breast-bone, with some massive wooden buttons, like backgammon men. As the lower portions of these pantaloons became revealed, Bunsby stood confessed; his hands in their pockets, which were of vast size; and his gaze directed, not to Captain Cuttle or the ladies, but the masthead.

The profound appearance of this philosopher, who was bulky and strong, and on whose extremely red face an expression of taciturnity sat enthroned, not inconsistent with his character, in which that quality was proudly conspicuous, almost daunted Captain Cuttle, though on familiar terms with him. Whispering to Florence that Bunsby had never in his life expressed surprise, and was considered not to know what it meant, the captain watched him as he eyed his masthead, and afterwards swept the horizon; and when the revolving eye seemed to be coming round in his direction, said:

"Bunsby, my lad, how fares it?"

A deep, gruff, husky utterance, which seemed to have no connection with Bunsby, and certainly had not the least effect upon his face, re-

plied, "Ay, ay, shipmet, how goes it?" At the same time Bunsby's right hand and arm, emerging from a pocket, shook the captain's, and went back again.

"Bunsby," said the captain, striking home at once, "here you are; a man of mind, and a man as can give an opinion. Here's a young lady as wants to take that opinion, in regard of my friend Wal'r; likewise my t'other friend, Sol Gills, which is a character for you to come within hail of, being a man of science, which is the mother of invention, and knows no law. Bunsby, will you wear, to oblige me, and come along with us?"

The great commander, who seemed, by the expression of his visage, to be always on the look-out for something in the extreme distance, and to have no ocular knowledge of anything within ten miles, made no reply whatever.

"Here is a man," said the captain, addressing himself to his fair auditors, and indicating the commander with his outstretched hook, "that has fell down more than any man alive; that has had more accidents happen to his own self than the Seaman's Hospital to all hands; that took as many spars and bars and bolts about the outside of his head, when he was young, as you'd want an order for on Chatham Yard to build a pleasure yacht with; and yet that got his opinions in that way, it's my belief, for there an't nothing like 'em afloat or ashore."

The stolid commander appeared, by a very slight vibration in his elbows, to express some satisfaction in this encomium; but if his face had been as distant as his gaze was, it could hardly have enlightened the beholders less in reference to anything that was passing in his thoughts.

"Shipmet," said Bunsby all of a sudden, and stooping down to look out under some interposing spar, "what'll the ladies drink?"

Captain Cuttle, whose delicacy was shocked by such an inquiry in connection with Florence, drew the sage aside, and seeming to explain in his ear, accompanied him below; where, that he might not take offence, the captain drank a dram himself, which Florence and Susan, glancing down the open sky-light, saw the sage, with difficulty finding room for himself between his berth and a very little brass fire-place, serve out for self and friend. They soon reappeared on deck, and Captain Cuttle, triumphing in the success of his enterprise, conducted Florence back to the coach, while Bunsby followed, escorting Miss Nipper, whom he hugged upon the way (much to that young lady's indignation) with his pilot-coated arm, like a blue bear.

The captain put his oracle inside, and gloried so much in having secured him, and having got that mind into a hackney coach, that he could not refrain from often peeping in at Florence through the little window behind the driver, and testifying his delight in smiles, and also in taps upon his forehead, to hint to her that the brain of Bunsby was hard at it. In the meantime, Bunsby, still hugging Miss Nipper (for his friend the captain had not exaggerated the softness of his heart), uniformly preserved his gravity of deportment, and showed no other consciousness of her or anything.

Uncle Sol, who had come home, received them at the door, and ushered them immediately into the little back-parlour, strangely altered by the absence of Walter. On the table, and about the room, were the charts and maps on which the heavy-hearted instrument-maker had again and again tracked the missing vessel across the sea, and on which, with a pair of compasses that he still had in his hand, he had been measuring, a minute before, how far she must have driven, to have driven here or there: and trying to demonstrate that a long time must elapse before hope was exhausted.

"Whether she can have run," said Uncle Sol, looking wistfully over the chart; "but no, that's almost impossible. Or whether she can have been forced by stress of weather—but that's not reasonably likely. Or whether there is any hope she so far changed her course as—but even I can hardly hope that!" With such broken suggestions, poor old Uncle Sol roamed over the great sheet before him, and could not find a speck of hopeful probability in it large enough to set one small point of the compasses upon.

Florence saw immediately—it would have been difficult to help seeing—that there was a singular indescribable change in the old man, and that, while his manner was far more restless and unsettled than usual, there was yet a curious contradictory decision in it, that perplexed her very much. She fancied once that he spoke wildly, and at random; for, on her saying she regretted not to have seen him when she had been there before that morning, he at first replied that he had been to see her, and directly afterwards seemed to wish to recall that answer.

"You have been to see me?" said Florence. "To-day?"

"Yes, my dear young lady," returned Uncle Sol, looking at her and away from her in a confused manner. "I wished to see you with my own eyes, and to hear you with my own ears, once more before—" There he stopped.

"Before when? Before what?" said Florence, putting her hand upon his arm.

"Did I say 'before?'" replied old Sol. "If I did, I must have meant before we should have news of my dear boy."

"You are not well," said Florence tenderly. "You have been so very anxious. I am sure you are not well."

"I am as well," returned the old man, shutting up his right hand, and holding it out to show her: "as well and firm as any man at my time of life can hope to be. See! It's steady. Is its master not as capable of resolution and fortitude as many a younger man? I think so. We shall see."

There was that in his manner more than in his words, though they remained with her too, which impressed Florence so much, that she would have confided her uneasiness to Captain Cuttle at that moment, if the captain had not seized that moment for expounding the state of circumstances on which the opinion of the sagacious Bunsby was requested, and entreating that profound authority to deliver the same.

Bunsby, whose eye continued to be addressed to somewhere about the half-way house between London and Gravesend, two or three times put out his rough right arm, as seeking to wind it, for inspiration, round the fair form of Miss Nipper; but that young female having withdrawn herself, in displeasure, to the opposite side of the table, the soft heart of the commander of the Cautious Clara met with no response to its impulses. After sundry failures in this wise, the commander, addressing himself to nobody, thus spake; or rather, the voice within him said of its own accord, and quite independent of himself, as if he were possessed by a gruff spirit:

"My name's Jack Bunsby!"

"He was christened John," cried the delighted Captain Cuttle. "Hear him!"

"And what I says," pursued the voice after some deliberation, "I stands to."

The captain, with Florence on his arm, nodded at the auditory, and seemed to say, "Now he's coming out. This is what I meant when I brought him."

"Whereby," proceeded the voice, "why not? If so, what odds? Can any man say otherwise? No. Awast then!"

When it had pursued its train of argument to this point, the voice stopped and rested. It then proceeded very slowly thus:

"Do I believe that this here Son and Heir's gone down, my lads? Mayhap. Do I say so? Which? If a skipper stands out by Sen' George's

Channel, making for the Downs, what's right ahead of him? The Goodwins. He isn't forced to run upon the Goodwins, but he may. The bearings of this observation lays in the application on it. That an't no part of my duty. Awast then, keep a bright look-out for'ard, and good luck to you!"

The voice here went out of the back-parlour, and into the street, taking the commander of the Cautious Clara with it, and accompanying him on board again with all convenient expedition, where he immediately turned in, and refreshed his mind with a nap.

The students of the sage's precepts, left to their own application of his wisdom—upon a principle which was the main leg of the Bunsby tripod, as it is perchance of some other oracular stools—looked at one another in a little uncertainty; while Rob the Grinder, who had taken the innocent freedom of peering in, and listening, through the sky-light in the roof, came softly down from the leads, in a state of very dense confusion. Captain Cuttle, however, whose admiration of Bunsby was, if possible, enhanced by the splendid manner in which he had justified his reputation and come through this solemn reference, proceeded to explain that Bunsby meant nothing but confidence; that Bunsby had no misgivings; and that such an opinion as that man had given, coming from such a mind as his, was Hope's own anchor, and with good roads to cast it in. Florence endeavoured to believe that the captain was right; but the Nipper, with her arms tight folded, shook her head in resolute denial, and had no more trust in Bunsby than in Mr. Perch himself.

The philosopher seemed to have left Uncle Sol pretty much where he had found him, for he still went roaming about the watery world, compasses in hand, and discovering no rest for them. It was in pursuance of a whisper in his ear from Florence, while the old man was absorbed in this pursuit, that Captain Cuttle laid his heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"What cheer, Sol Gills?" cried the captain heartily.

"But so-so, Ned," returned the instrument-maker. "I have been remembering, all this afternoon, that on the very day when my boy entered Dombey's House, and came home late to dinner, sitting just there where you stand, we talked of storm and shipwreck, and I could hardly turn him from the subject."

But meeting the eyes of Florence, which were fixed with earnest scrutiny upon his face, the old man stopped and smiled.

"Stand by, old friend!" cried the captain.

"Look alive! I tell you what, Sol Gills; arter I've convoyed Heart's Delight safe home,"—here the captain kissed his hook to Florence,— "I'll come back and take you in tow for the rest of this blessed day. You'll come and eat your dinner along with me, Sol, somewheres or other."

"Not to-day, Ned!" said the old man quickly, and appearing to be unaccountably startled by the proposition. "Not to-day. I couldn't do it!"

"Why not?" returned the captain, gazing at him in astonishment.

"I—I have so much to do. I—I mean to think of, and arrange. I couldn't do it, Ned, indeed. I must go out again, and be alone, and turn my mind to many things to-day."

The captain looked at the instrument-maker, and looked at Florence, and again at the instrument-maker. "To-morrow, then," he suggested at last.

"Yes, yes. To-morrow," said the old man.

"Think of me to-morrow. Say to-morrow."

"I shall come here early, mind, Sol Gills," stipulated the captain.

"Yes, yes. The first thing to-morrow morning," said old Sol; "and now good-bye, Ned Cuttle, and God bless you!"

Squeezing both the captain's hands with uncommon fervour as he said it, the old man turned to Florence, folded hers in his own, and put them to his lips; then hurried her out to the coach with very singular precipitation. Altogether, he made such an effect on Captain Cuttle that the captain lingered behind, and instructed Rob to be particularly gentle and attentive to his master until the morning: which injunction he strengthened with the payment of one shilling down, and the promise of another sixpence before noon next day. This kind office performed, Captain Cuttle, who considered himself the natural and lawful body-guard of Florence, mounted the box with a mighty sense of his trust, and escorted her home. At parting, he assured her that he would stand by Sol Gills, close and true; and once again inquired of Susan Nipper, unable to forget her gallant words in reference to Mrs. MacStinger, "Would you, do you think, my dear, though?"

When the desolate house had closed upon the two, the captain's thoughts reverted to the old instrument-maker, and he felt uncomfortable. Therefore, instead of going home, he walked up and down the street several times, and, eking out his leisure until evening, dined late at a certain angular little tavern in the City, with a public parlour like a wedge, to which glazed

hats much resorted. The captain's principal intention was to pass Sol Gills's after dark, and look in through the window: which he did. The parlour door stood open, and he could see his old friend writing busily and steadily at the table within, while the little Midshipman, already sheltered from the night dews, watched him from the counter; under which Rob the Grinder made his own bed, preparatory to shutting the shop. Reassured by the tranquillity that reigned within the precincts of the wooden mariner, the captain headed for Brig Place, resolving to weigh anchor betimes in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STUDY OF A LOVING HEART.

SIR BARNET and Lady Skettles, very good people, resided in a pretty villa at Fulham, on the banks of the Thames; which was one of the most desirable residences in the world when a rowing match happened to be going past, but had its little inconveniences at other times, among which may be enumerated the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room, and the contemporaneous disappearance of the lawn and shrubbery.

Sir Barnet Skettles expressed his personal consequence chiefly through an antique gold snuff-box, and a ponderous silk pocket-handkerchief, which he had an imposing manner of drawing out of his pocket like a banner, and using with both hands at once. Sir Barnet's object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water—not to disparage so worthy a gentleman by the comparison—it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever-widening circle about him, until there was no room left. Or, like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling for ever through the interminable fields of space, nothing but coming to the end of his moral tether could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system.

Sir Barnet was proud of making people acquainted with people. He liked the thing for its own sake, and it advanced his favourite object too. For example, if Sir Barnet had the

good fortune to get hold of a raw recruit, or a country gentleman, and ensnared him to his hospitable villa; Sir Barnet would say to him, on the morning after his arrival, "Now, my dear sir, is there anybody you would like to know? Who is there you would wish to meet? Do you take any interest in writing people, or in painting or sculpturing people, or in acting people, or in anything of that sort?" Possibly the patient answered yes, and mentioned somebody of whom Sir Barnet had no more personal knowledge than of Ptolemy the Great. Sir Barnet replied that nothing on earth was easier, as he knew him very well: immediately called on the aforesaid somebody, left his card, wrote a short note,—"My dear Sir—penalty of your eminent position—friend at my house naturally desirous—Lady Skettles and myself participate—trust that genius being superior to ceremonies, you will do us the distinguished favour of giving us the pleasure," &c. &c.—and so killed a brace of birds with one stone, dead as door-nails.

With the snuff-box and banner in full force, Sir Barnet Skettles propounded his usual inquiry to Florence on the first morning of her visit. When Florence thanked him, and said there was no one in particular whom she desired to see, it was natural she should think with a pang of poor lost Walter. When Sir Barnet Skettles, urging his kind offer, said, "My dear Miss Dombey, are you sure you can remember no one whom your good papa—to whom I beg you to present the best compliments of myself and Lady Skettles when you write—might wish you to know?" it was natural, perhaps, that her poor head should droop a little, and that her voice should tremble as it softly answered in the negative.

Skettles junior, much stiffened as to his cravat, and sobered down as to his spirits, was at home for the holidays, and appeared to feel himself aggrieved by the solicitude of his excellent mother that he should be attentive to Florence. Another and a deeper injury under which the soul of young Barnet chafed was the company of Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, who had been invited on a visit to the parental roof-tree, and of whom the young gentleman often said he would have preferred their passing the vacation at Jericho.

"Is there anybody *you* can suggest, now, Doctor Blimber?" said Sir Barnet Skettles, turning to that gentleman.

"You are very kind, Sir Barnet," returned Doctor Blimber. "Really I am not aware that there is, in particular. I like to know my fellow-men in general, Sir Barnet. What does Terence

say? Any one who is the parent of a son is interesting to me."

"Has Mrs. Blimber any wish to see any remarkable person?" asked Sir Barnet courteously.

Mrs. Blimber replied, with a sweet smile and a shake of her sky-blue cap, that if Sir Barnet could have made her known to Cicero, she would have troubled him; but such an introduction not being feasible, and she already enjoying the friendship of himself and his amiable lady, and possessing, with the Doctor her husband, their joint confidence in regard to their dear son—here young Barnet was observed to curl his nose—she asked no more.

Sir Barnet was fain, under these circumstances, to content himself for the time with the company assembled. Florence was glad of that; for she had a study to pursue among them, and it lay too near her heart, and was too precious and momentous to yield to any other interest.

There were some children staying in the house. Children who were as frank and happy with fathers and with mothers as those rosy faces opposite home. Children who had no restraint upon their love, and freely showed it. Florence sought to learn their secret; sought to find out what it was she had missed; what simple art they knew, and she knew not; how she could be taught by them to show her father that she loved him, and to win his love again.

Many a day did Florence thoughtfully observe these children. On many a bright morning did she leave her bed when the glorious sun rose, and walking up and down upon the river's bank before any one in the house was stirring, look up at the windows of their rooms, and think of them, asleep, so gently tended and affectionately thought of. Florence would feel more lonely then than in the great house all alone; and would think sometimes that she was better there than here, and that there was greater peace in hiding herself than in mingling with others of her age, and finding how unlike them all she was. But attentive to her study, though it touched her to the quick at every little leaf she turned in the hard book, Florence remained among them, and tried, with patient hope, to gain the knowledge that she wearied for.

Ah! how to gain it? how to know the charm in its beginning? There were daughters here who rose up in the morning, and lay down to rest at night, possessed of fathers' hearts already. They had no repulse to overcome, no coldness to dread, no frown to smooth away. As the morning advanced, and the windows opened one by

one, and the dew began to dry upon the flowers and grass, and youthful feet began to move upon the lawn, Florence, glancing round at the bright faces, thought, What was there she could learn from these children? It was too late to learn from them; each could approach her father fearlessly, and put up her lips to meet the ready kiss, and wind her arm about the neck that bent down to caress her. *She* could not begin by being so bold. Oh! could it be that there was less and less hope as she studied more and more?

She remembered well that even the old woman who had robbed her when a little child—whose image and whose house, and all she had said and done, were stamped upon her recollection, with the enduring sharpness of a fearful impression made at that early period of life—had spoken fondly of her daughter, and how terribly even she had cried out in the pain of hopeless separation from her child. But her own mother, she would think again, when she recalled this, had loved her well. Then, sometimes, when her thoughts reverted swiftly to the void between herself and her father, Florence would tremble, and the tears would start upon her face, as she pictured to herself her mother living on, and coming also to dislike her, because of her wanting the unknown grace that should conciliate that father naturally, and had never done so from her cradle. She knew that this imagination did wrong to her mother's memory, and had no truth in it, or base to rest upon; and yet she tried so hard to justify him, and to find the whole blame in herself, that she could not resist its passing, like a wild cloud, through the distance of her mind.

There came among the other visitors, soon after Florence, one beautiful girl, three or four years younger than she, who was an orphan child, and who was accompanied by her aunt, a grey-haired lady, who spoke much to Florence, and who greatly liked (but that they all did) to hear her sing of an evening, and would always sit near her at that time, with motherly interest. They had only been two days in the house when Florence, being in an arbour in the garden one warm morning, musingly observant of a youthful group upon the turf, through some intervening boughs, and wreathing flowers for the head of one little creature among them who was the pet and plaything of the rest, heard this same lady and her niece, in pacing up and down a sheltered nook close by, speak of herself.

"Is Florence an orphan like me, aunt?" said the child.

"No, my love. She has no mother, but her father is living."

"Is she in mourning for her poor mamma now?" inquired the child quickly.

"No; for her only brother."

"Has she no other brother?"

"None."

"No sister?"

"None."

"I am very, very sorry!" said the little girl.

As they stopped soon afterwards to watch some boats, and had been silent in the meantime, Florence, who had risen when she heard her name, and had gathered up her flowers to go and meet them, that they might know of her being within hearing, resumed her seat and work, expecting to hear no more; but the conversation recommenced next moment.

"Florence is a favourite with every one here, and deserves to be, I am sure," said the child earnestly. "Where is her papa?"

The aunt replied, after a moment's pause, that she did not know. Her tone of voice arrested Florence, who had started from her seat again; and held her fastened to the spot, with her work hastily caught up to her bosom, and her two hands saving it from being scattered on the ground.

"He is in England, I hope, aunt?" said the child.

"I believe so. Yes; I know he is, indeed."

"Has he ever been here?"

"I believe not. No."

"Is he coming here to see her?"

"I believe not."

"Is he lame, or blind, or ill, aunt?" asked the child.

The flowers that Florence held to her breast began to fall when she heard those words, so wonderingly spoken. She held them closer; and her face hung down upon them.

"Kate," said the lady after another moment of silence, "I will tell you the whole truth about Florence as I have heard it, and believe it to be. Tell no one else, my dear, because it may be little known here, and your doing so would give her pain."

"I never will!" exclaimed the child.

"I know you never will," returned the lady.

"I can trust you as myself. I fear then, Kate, that Florence's father cares little for her, very seldom sees her, never was kind to her in her life, and now quite shuns her and avoids her. She would love him dearly if he would suffer her, but he will not—though for no fault of hers; and she is greatly to be loved and pitied by all gentle hearts."

More of the flowers that Florence held fell scattering on the ground; those that remained

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were wet, but not with dew; and her face dropped upon her laden hands.

"Poor Florence! Dear, good. Florence!" cried the child.

"Do you know why I have told you this, Kate?" said the lady.

"That I may be very kind to her, and take great care to try to please her. Is that the reason, aunt?"

"Partly," said the lady, "but not all. Though we see her so cheerful; with a pleasant smile for every one; ready to oblige us all, and bearing her part in every amusement here: she can hardly be quite happy, do you think she can, Kate?"

"I am afraid not," said the little girl.

"And you can understand," pursued the lady, "why her observation of children who have parents who are fond of them, and proud of them—like many here just now—should make her sorrowful in secret."

"Yes, dear aunt," said the child, "I understand that very well. 'Poor Florence!'"

More flowers strayed upon the ground, and those she yet held to her breast trembled as if a wintry wind were rustling them.

"My Kate," said the lady, whose voice was serious, but very calm and sweet, and had so impressed Florence from the first moment of her hearing it, "of all the youthful people here, you are her natural and harmless friend; you have not the innocent means, that happier children have—"

"There are none happier, aunt!" exclaimed the child, who seemed to cling about her.

"—As other children have, dear Kate, of reminding her of her misfortune. Therefore I would have you, when you try to be her little friend, try all the more for that, and feel that the bereavement you sustained—thank Heaven! before you knew its weight—gives you claim and hold upon poor Florence."

"But I am not without a parent's love, aunt, and I never have been," said the child, "with you."

"However that may be, my dear," returned the lady, "your misfortune is a lighter one than Florence's; for not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an out-cast from a living parent's love."

The flowers were scattered on the ground like dust; the empty hands were spread upon the face; and orphaned Florence, shrinking down upon the ground, wept long and bitterly.

But true of heart, and resolute in her good purpose, Florence held to it as her dying mother held by her upon the day that gave Paul life.

He did not know how much she loved him. However long the time in coming, and however slow the interval, she must try to bring that knowledge to her father's heart one day or other. Meantime, she must be careful in no thoughtless word, or look, or burst of feeling awakened by any chance circumstance, to complain against him, or to give occasion for these whispers to his prejudice.

Even in the response she made the orphan child, to whom she was attracted strongly, and whom she had such occasion to remember, Florence was mindful of him. If she singled her out too plainly (Florence thought) from among the rest, she would confirm—in one mind certainly: perhaps in more—the belief that he was cruel and unnatural. Her own delight was no set-off to this. What she had overheard was a reason, not for soothing herself, but for saving him; and Florence did it, in pursuance of the study of her heart.

She did so always. If a book were read aloud, and there were anything in the story that pointed at an unkind father, she was in pain for their application of it to him; not for herself. So with any trifle of an interlude that was acted, or picture that was shown, or game that was played, among them. The occasions for such tenderness towards him were so many, that her mind misgave her often, it would indeed be better to go back to the old house, and live again within the shadow of its dull walls, undisturbed. How few who saw sweet Florence, in her spring of womanhood, the modest little queen of those small revels, imagined what a load of sacred care lay heavy in her breast! How few of those who stiffened in her father's freezing atmosphere suspected what a heap of fiery coals was piled upon his head!

Florence pursued her study patiently, and failing to acquire the secret of the nameless grace she sought among the youthful company who were assembled in the house, often walked out alone, in the early morning, among the children of the poor. But still she found them all too far advanced to learn from. They had won their household places long ago, and did not stand without, as she did, with a bar across the door.

There was one man whom she several times observed at work very early, and often with a girl of about her own age seated near him. He was a very poor man, who seemed to have no regular employment, but now went roaming about the banks of the river when the tide was low, looking out for bits and scraps in the mud; and now worked at the unpromising little patch

of garden ground before his cottage; and now tinkered up a miserable old boat that belonged to him; or did some job of that kind for a neighbour, as chance occurred. Whatever the man's labour, the girl was never employed; but sat, when she was with him, in a listless, moping state, and idle.

Florence had often wished to speak to this man; yet she had never taken courage to do so, as he made no movement towards her. But one morning when she happened to come upon him suddenly, from a by-path among some pollard willows which terminated in the little shelving piece of stony ground that lay between his dwelling and the water, where he was bending over a fire he had made to calk the old boat which was lying bottom upwards close by, he raised his head at the sound of her footstep, and gave her Good morning.

"Good morning," said Florence, approaching nearer; "you are at work early."

"I'd be glad to be often at work earlier, miss, if I had work to do."

"Is it so hard to get?" asked Florence.

"I find it so," replied the man.

Florence glanced to where the girl was sitting, drawn together, with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, and said:

"Is that your daughter?"

He raised his head quickly, and looking towards the girl with a brightened face, nodded to her, and said "Yes." Florence looked towards her too, and gave her a kind salutation; the girl muttered something in return, ungraciously and sullenly.

"Is she in want of employment also?" said Florence.

The man shook his head. "No, miss," he said, "I work for both."

"Are there only you two, then?" inquired Florence.

"Only us two," said the man. "Her mother has been dead these ten year. Martha!" (he lifted up his head again, and whistled to her) "won't you say a word to the pretty young lady?"

The girl made an impatient gesture with her cowering shoulders, and turned her head another way. Ugly, misshapen, peevish, ill-conditioned, ragged, dirty—but beloved! Oh yes! Florence had seen her father's look towards her, and she knew whose look it had no likeness to.

"I'm afraid she's worse this morning, my poor girl!" said the man, suspending his work, and contemplating his ill-favoured child with a compassion that was the more tender for being rough.

"She is ill, then?" said Florence.

The man drew a deep sigh. "I don't believe my Martha's had five short days' good health," he answered, looking at her still, "in as many long years."

"Ay! and more than that, John," said a neighbour, who had come down to help him with the boat.

"More than that you say, do you?" cried the other, pushing back his battered hat, and drawing his hand across his forehead. "Very like. It seems a long, long time."

"And the more the time," pursued the neighbour, "the more you've favoured and humoured her, John, till she's got to be a burden to herself, and everybody else."

"Not to me," said her father, falling to his work again. "Not to me."

Florence could feel—who better?—how truly he spoke. She drew a little closer to him, and would have been glad to touch his rugged hand, and thank him for his goodness to the miserable object that he looked upon with eyes so different from any other man's.

"Who would favour my poor girl—to call it favouring—if I didn't?" said the father.

"Ay, ay," cried the neighbour. "In reason, John. But you! You rob yourself to give to her. You bind yourself hand and foot on her account. You make your life miserable along of her. And what does *she* care? You don't believe she knows it?"

The father lifted up his head again, and whistled to her. Martha made the same impatient gesture with her crouching shoulders in reply; and he was glad and happy.

"Only for that, miss," said the neighbour with a smile, in which there was more of secret sympathy than he expressed; "only to get that, he never lets her out of his sight!"

"Because the day'll come, and has been coming a long while," observed the other, bending low over his work, "when to get half as much from that unfort'nate child of mine—to get the trembling of a finger, or the waving of a hair—would be to raise the dead."

Florence softly put some money near his hand on the old boat, and left him.

And now Florence began to think, if she were to fall ill, if she were to fade like her dear brother, would he then know that she had loved him; would she then grow dear to him; would he come to her bedside, when she was weak and dim of sight, and take her into his embrace, and cancel all the past? Would he so forgive her, in that changed condition, for not having been able to lay open her childish heart to him, as to

make it easy to relate with what emotions she had gone out of his room that night; what she had meant to say if she had had the courage; and how she had endeavoured, afterwards, to learn the way she never knew in infancy?

Yes, she thought, if she were dying, he would relent. She thought, that if she lay, serene and not unwilling to depart, upon the bed that was curtained round with recollections of their darling boy, he would be touched home, and would say, "Dear Florence, live for me, and we will love each other as we might have done, and be as happy as we might have been these many years!" She thought that if she heard such words from him, and had her arms clasped round him, she could answer with a smile, "It is too late for anything but this; I never could be happier, dear father!" and so leave him, with a blessing on her lips.

The golden water she remembered on the wall appeared to Florence, in the light of such reflections, only as a current flowing on to rest, and to a region where the dear ones, gone before, were waiting, hand-in-hand; and often, when she looked upon the darker river rippling at her feet, she thought with awful wonder, but not terror, of that river which her brother had so often said was bearing him away.

The father and his sick daughter were yet fresh in Florence's mind, and, indeed, that incident was not a week old, when Sir Barnet and his lady, going out walking in the lanes one afternoon, proposed to her to bear them company. Florence readily consenting, Lady Skettles ordered out young Barnet as a matter of course. For nothing delighted Lady Skettles so much as beholding her eldest son with Florence on his arm.

Barnet, to say the truth, appeared to entertain an opposite sentiment on the subject, and on such occasions frequently expressed himself audibly, though indefinitely, in reference to "a parcel of girls." As it was not easy to ruffle her sweet temper, however, Florence generally reconciled the young gentleman to his fate after a few minutes, and they strolled on amicably; Lady Skettles and Sir Barnet following, in a state of perfect complacency and high gratification.

This was the order of procedure on the afternoon in question: and Florence had almost succeeded in overruling the present objections of Skettles junior to his destiny, when a gentleman on horseback came riding by, looked at them earnestly as he passed, drew in his rein, wheeled round, and came riding back again, hat in hand.

The gentleman had looked particularly at

Florence; and when the little party stopped, on his riding back, he bowed to her before saluting S. Barnet and his lady. Florence had no remembrance of having ever seen him, but she started involuntarily when he came near her, and drew back.

"My horse is perfectly quiet, I assure you," said the gentleman.

It was not that, but something in the gentleman himself—Florence could not have said what—that made her recoil as if she had been stung.



"THE FLOWERS WERE SCATTERED ON THE GROUND LIKE DUST; THE EMPTY HANDS WERE SPREAD UPON THE FACE; AND ORPHANED FLORENCE, SHRINKING DOWN UPON THE GROUND, WEPT LONG AND BITTERLY."

"I have the honour to address Miss Dombey, I believe," said the gentleman with a most persuasive smile. On Florence inclining her head, he added, "My name is Carker. I can hardly hope to be remembered by Miss Dombey except by name. Carker."

Florence, sensible of a strange inclination to shiver, though the day was hot, presented him to her host and hostess; by whom he was very graciously received.

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Carker, "a thousand times! But I am going down to-morrow

morning to Mr. Dombey, at Leamington, and if Miss Dombey can intrust me with any commission, need I say how *very* happy I shall be?"

Sir Barnet, immediately divining that Florence would desire to write a letter to her father, proposed to return, and besought Mr. Carker to come home and dine in his riding gear. Mr. Carker had the misfortune to be engaged for dinner, but if Miss Dombey wished to write, nothing would delight him more than to accompany them back, and to be her faithful slave in waiting as long as she pleased. As he said this with his widest smile, and bent down close to her to pat his horse's neck, Florence, meeting his eyes, saw, rather than heard him say, "There is no news of the ship!"

Confused, frightened, shrinking from him, and not even sure that he had said those words, for he seemed to have shown them to her in some extraordinary manner through his smile instead of uttering them, Florence faintly said that she was obliged to him, but she would not write; she had nothing to say.

"Nothing to send, Miss Dombey?" said the man of teeth.

"Nothing," said Florence, "but my—but my dear love—if you please."

Disturbed as Florence was, she raised her eyes to his face with an imploring and expressive look, that plainly besought him, if he knew—which he as plainly did—that any message between her and her father was an uncommon charge, but that one most of all, to spare her. Mr. Carker smiled and bowed low, and being charged by Sir Barnet with the best compliments of himself and Lady Skettles, took his leave, and rode away; leaving a favourable impression on that worthy couple. Florence was seized with such a shudder as he went, that Sir Barnet, adopting the popular superstition, supposed somebody was passing over her grave. Mr. Carker, turning a corner on the instant, looked back, and bowed, and disappeared, as if he rode off to the churchyard straight to do it.

CHAPTER XXV.

STRANGE NEWS OF UNCLE SOL.

CAPTAIN CUTTLE, though no sluggard, did not turn so early on the morning after he had seen Sol Gills, through the shop-window, writing in the parlour, with the Midshipman upon the counter, and Rob the Grinder making

up his bed below it, but that the clocks struck six as he raised himself on his elbow, and took a survey of his little chamber. The captain's eyes must have done severe duty, if he usually opened them as wide on awaking as he did that morning; and were but roughly rewarded for their vigilance, if he generally rubbed them half as hard. But the occasion was no common one, for Rob the Grinder had certainly never stood in the doorway of Captain Cuttle's bedroom before, and in it he stood then, panting at the captain, with a flushed and tousled air of bed about him, that greatly heightened both his colour and expression.

"Holloa!" roared the captain. "What's the matter?"

Before Rob could stammer a word in answer, Captain Cuttle turned out, all in a heap, and covered the boy's mouth with his hand.

"Steady, my lad," said the captain; "don't ye speak a word to me as yet!"

The captain, looking at his visitor in great consternation, gently shouldered him into the next room, after laying this injunction upon him; and disappearing for a few moments, forthwith returned in the blue suit. Holding up his hand in token of the injunction not yet being taken off, Captain Cuttle walked up to the cupboard, and poured himself out a dram: a counterpart of which he handed to the messenger. The captain then stood himself up in a corner, against the wall, as if to forestall the possibility of being knocked backward by the communication that was to be made to him; and having swallowed his liquor, with his eyes fixed on the messenger, and his face as pale as his face could be, requested him to "have ahead."

"Do you mean tell you, captain?" asked Rob, who had been greatly impressed by these precautions.

"Ay!" said the captain.

"Well, sir," said Rob, "I ain't got much to tell. But look here!"

Rob produced a bundle of keys. The captain surveyed them, remained in his corner, and surveyed the messenger.

"And look here!" pursued Rob.

The boy produced a sealed packet, which Captain Cuttle stared at as he had stared at the keys.

"When I woke this morning, captain," said Rob, "which was about a quarter after five, I found these on my pillow. The shop-door was unbolted and unlocked, and Mr. Gills gone."

"Gone!" roared the captain.

"Flowed, sir," returned Rob.

The captain's voice was so tremendous, and he came out of his corner with such way on him, that Rob retreated before him into another corner: holding out the keys and packet, to prevent himself from being run down.

"For Captain Cuttle, sir," cried Rob, "is on the keys and on the packet too. Upon my word and honour, Captain Cuttle, I don't know anything more about it. I wish I may die if I do! Here's a situation for a lad that's just got a situation," cried the unfortunate Grinder, screwing his cuff into his face: "his master bolted with his place, and him blamed for it!"

These lamentations had reference to Captain Cuttle's gaze, or rather glare, which was full of vague suspicions, threatenings, and denunciations. Taking the proffered packet from his hand, the captain opened it, and read as follows:—

"My dear Ned Cuttle. Enclosed is my will"—the captain turned it over with a doubtful look—"and testament.—Where's the testament?" said the captain, instantly impeaching the ill-fated Grinder. "What have you done with that, my lad?"

"I never see it," whimpered Rob. "Don't keep on suspecting an innocent lad, captain. I never touched the testament."

Captain Cuttle shook his head, implying that somebody must be made answerable for it; and gravely proceeded:—

"Which don't break open for a year, or until you have decisive intelligence of my dear Walter, who is dear to you, Ned, too, I am sure." The captain paused and shook his head in some emotion; then, as a re-establishment of his dignity in this trying position, looked with exceeding sternness at the Grinder. "If you should never hear of me, or see me more, Ned, remember an old friend as he will remember you to the last—kindly; and at least until the period I have mentioned has expired, keep a home in the old place for Walter. There are no debts, the loan from Dombey's House is paid off, and all my keys I send with this. Keep this quiet, and make no inquiry for me; it is useless. So no more, dear Ned, from your true friend, Solomon Gills." The captain took a long breath, and then read these words, written below: "The boy Rob, well recommended, as I told you, from Dombey's House. If all else should come to the hammer, take care, Ned, of the little Midshipman."

To convey to posterity any idea of the manner in which the captain, after turning this letter over and over, and reading it a score of times, sat down in his chair, and held a court-martial

on the subject in his own mind, would require the united genius of all the great men who, discarding their own untoward days, have determined to go down to posterity, and have never got there. At first the captain was too much confounded and distressed to think of anything but the letter itself; and even when his thoughts began to glance upon the various attendant facts, they might, perhaps, as well have occupied themselves with their former theme, for any light they reflected on them. In this state of mind, Captain Cuttle having the Grinder before the court, and no one else, found it a great relief to decide, generally, that he was an object of suspicion: which the captain so clearly expressed in his visage, that Rob remonstrated.

"Oh, don't, captain!" cried the Grinder. "I wonder how you can! What have I done to be looked at like that?"

"My lad," said Captain Cuttle, "don't you sing out afore you're hurt. And don't you commit yourself, whatever you do."

"I haven't been and committed nothing, captain," answered Rob.

"Keep her free, then," said the captain impressively, "and ride easy."

With a deep sense of the responsibility imposed upon him, and the necessity of thoroughly fathoming this mysterious affair, as became a man in his relations with the parties, Captain Cuttle resolved to go down and examine the premises, and to keep the Grinder with him. Considering that youth as under arrest at present, the captain was in some doubt whether it might not be expedient to handcuff him, or tie his ankles together, or attach a weight to his legs, but not being clear as to the legality of such formalities, the captain decided merely to hold him by the shoulder all the way, and knock him down if he made any objection.

However, he made none, and consequently got to the instrument-maker's house without being placed under any more stringent restraint. As the shutters were not yet taken down, the captain's first care was to have the shop opened; and, when the daylight was freely admitted, he proceeded, with its aid, to further investigation.

The captain's first care was to establish himself in a chair in the shop as president of the solemn tribunal that was sitting within him; and to require Rob to lie down in his bed under the counter, show exactly where he discovered the keys and packet when he awoke, how he found the door when he went to try it, how he started off to Brig Place—cautiously preventing the latter imitation from being carried farther than the threshold—and so on to the end of the

chapter. When all this had been done several times, the captain shook his head, and seemed to think the matter had a bad look.

Next, the captain, with some indistinct idea of finding a body, instituted a strict search over the whole house; groping in the cellars with a lighted candle, thrusting his hook behind doors, bringing his head into violent contact with beams, and covering himself with cobwebs. Mounting up to the old man's bedroom, they found that he had not been in bed on the previous night, but had merely lain down on the coverlet, as was evident from the impression yet remaining there.

"And I think, captain," said Rob, looking round the room, "that when Mr. Gills was going in and out so often, these last few days, he was taking little things away piecemeal, not to attract attention."

"Ay!" said the captain mysteriously "Why so, my lad?"

"Why," returned Rob, looking about, "I don't see, his shaving tackle. Nor his brushes, captain. Nor no shirts. Nor yet his shoes."

As each of these articles was mentioned, Captain Cuttle took particular notice of the corresponding department of the Grinder, lest he should appear to have been in recent use, or should prove to be in present possession thereof. But Rob had no occasion to shave, certainly was not brushed, and wore the clothes he had worn for a long time past, beyond all possibility of mistake.

"And what should you say," said the captain—"not committing yourself—about his time of sheering off? Hey?"

"Why, I think, captain," returned Rob, "that he must have gone pretty soon after I began to snore."

"What o'clock was that?" said the captain, prepared to be very particular about the exact time.

"How can I tell, captain?" answered Rob. "I only know that I'm a heavy sleeper at first, and a light one towards morning; and if Mr. Gills had come through the shop near daybreak, though ever so much on tiptoe, I'm pretty sure I should have heard him shut the door at all events."

On mature consideration of this evidence, Captain Cuttle began to think that the instrument-maker must have vanished of his own accord; to which logical conclusion he was assisted by the letter addressed to himself, which, as being unquestionably in the old man's handwriting, would seem, with no great forcing, to bear the construction, that he arranged of his

own will to go, and so went. The captain had next to consider where and why? and, as there was no way whatsoever that he saw to the solution of the first difficulty, he confined his meditations to the second.

Remembering the old man's curious manner, and the farewell he had taken of him: unaccountably fervent at the time, but quite intelligible now: a terrible apprehension strengthened on the captain, that, overpowered by his anxieties and regrets for Walter, he had been driven to commit suicide. Unequal to the wear and tear of daily life, as he had often professed himself to be, and shaken as he no doubt was by the uncertainty and deferred hope he had undergone, it seemed no violently-strained misgiving, but only too probable.

Free from debt, and with no fear for his personal liberty, or the seizure of his goods, what else but such a state of madness could have hurried him away alone and secretly? As to his carrying some apparel with him, if he had really done so—and they were not even sure of that—he might have done so, the captain argued, to prevent inquiry, to distract attention from his probable fate, or to ease the very mind that was now revolving all these possibilities. Such, reduced into plain language, and condensed within a small compass, was the final result and substance of Captain Cuttle's deliberations; which took a long time to arrive at this pass, and were, like some more public deliberations, very discursive and disorderly.

Dejected and despondent in the extreme, Captain Cuttle felt it just to release Rob from the arrest in which he had placed him, and to enlarge him, subject to a kind of honourable inspection which he still resolved to exercise; and having hired a man, from Brogley the broker, to sit in the shop during their absence, the captain, taking Rob with him, issued forth upon a dismal quest after the mortal remains of Solomon Gills.

Not a station-house or bone-house or work-house in the metropolis escaped a visitation from the hard glazed hat. Along the wharfs, among the shipping, on the bank-side, up the river, down the river, here, there, everywhere, it went gleaming where men were thickest, like the hero's helmet in an epic battle. For a whole week the captain read of all the found and missing people in all the newspapers and handbills, and went forth on expeditions at all hours of the day to identify Solomon Gills, in poor little ship-boys who had fallen overboard, and in tall foreigners with dark beards who had taken poison—"to make sure." Captain Cuttle

said, "that it warn't him." It is a sure thing that it never was, and that the good captain had no other satisfaction.

Captain Cuttle at last abandoned these attempts as hopeless, and set himself to consider what was to be done next. After several new perusals of his poor friend's letter, he considered that the maintenance of "a home in the old place for Walter" was the primary duty imposed upon him. Therefore, the captain's decision

was that he would keep house on the premises of Solomon Gills himself, and would go into the instrument business, and see what came of it.

But, as this step involved the relinquishment of his apartments at Mrs. MacStinger's, and he knew that resolute woman would never hear of his deserting them, the captain took the desperate determination of running away.

"Now, look ye here, my lad," said the captain to Rob when he had matured this notable



"THE CAPTAIN'S VOICE WAS SO TREMENDOUS, AND HE CAME OUT OF HIS CORNER WITH SUCH WAY ON HIM, THAT ROB RETREATED BEFORE HIM INTO ANOTHER CORNER: HOLDING OUT THE KEYS AND PACKET, TO PREVENT HIMSELF FROM BEING RUN DOWN."

scheme; "to-morrow, I shan't be found in this here roadstead till night—not till arter midnight p'rhaps. But you keep watch till you hear me knock, and the moment you do, turn-to and open the door."

"Very good, captain," said Rob.

"You'll continu'd to be rated on these here books," pursued the captain condescendingly, "and I don't say but what you may get promotion, if you and me should pull together with

a will. But the moment you hear me knock to-morrow night, whatever time it is, turn-to and show yourself smart with the door."

"I'll be sure to do it, captain," replied Rob.

"Because, you understand," resumed the captain, coming back again to enforce this charge upon his mind, "there may be, for anything I can say, a chase; and I might be took while I was waiting, if you didn't show yourself smart with the door."

Rob again assured the captain that he would be prompt and wakeful; and the captain, having made this prudent arrangement, went home to Mrs. MacStinger's for the last time.

The sense the captain had of its being the last time, and of the awful purpose hidden beneath his blue waistcoat, inspired him with such a mortal dread of Mrs. MacStinger, that the sound of that lady's foot down-stairs, at any time of the day, was sufficient to throw him into a fit of trembling. It fell out, too, that Mrs. MacStinger was in a charming temper—mild and placid as a house-lamb; and Captain Cuttle's conscience suffered terrible twinges when she came up to inquire if she could cook him nothing for his dinner.

"A nice small kidney-pudding now, Cap'en Cuttle," said his landlady: "or a sheep's heart. Don't mind my trouble."

"No, thankee, ma'am," returned the captain.

"Have a roast fowl," said Mrs. MacStinger, "with a bit of weal stuffing and some egg sauce. Come, Cap'en Cuttle! Give yourself a little treat!"

"No, thankee, ma'am," returned the captain very humbly.

"I'm sure you're out of sorts, and want to be stimulated," said Mrs. MacStinger. "Why not have, for once in a way, a bottle of sherry wine?"

"Well, ma'am," rejoined the captain, "if you'd be so good as to take a glass or two, I think I would try that. Would you do me the favour, ma'am," said the captain, torn to pieces by his conscience, "to accept a quarter's rent ahead?"

"And why so, Cap'en Cuttle?" retorted Mrs. MacStinger—sharply as the captain thought.

The captain was frightened to death. "If you would, ma'am," he said with submission, "it would oblige me. I can't keep my money very well. It pays itself out. I should take it kind if you'd comply."

"Well, Cap'en Cuttle," said the unconscious MacStinger, rubbing her hands, "you can do as you please. It's not for me, with my family, to refuse, no more than it is to ask."

"And would you, ma'am," said the captain, taking down the tin canister, in which he kept his cash, from the top shelf of the cupboard, "be so good as offer eighteen-pence apiece to the little family all round? If you could make it convenient, ma'am, to pass the word presently for them children to come for'ard in a body, I should be glad to see 'em."

These innocent MacStingers were so many daggers to the captain's breast, when they ap-

peared in a swarm, and tore at him with the confiding trustfulness he so little deserved. The eye of Alexander MacStinger, who had been his favourite, was insupportable to the captain; the voice of Juliana MacStinger, who was the picture of her mother, made a coward of him.

Captain Cuttle kept up appearances, nevertheless, tolerably well, and for an hour or two was very hardly used and roughly handled by the young MacStingers: who, in their childish frolics, did a little damage also to the glazed hat, by sitting in it, two at a time, as in a nest, and drumming on the inside of the crown with their shoes. At length the captain sorrowfully dismissed them; taking leave of these cherubs with the poignant remorse and grief of a man who was going to execution.

In the silence of night the captain packed up his heavier property in a chest, which he locked, intending to leave it there, in all probability for ever, but on the forlorn chance of one day finding a man sufficiently bold and desperate to come and ask for it. Of his lighter necessities the captain made a bundle; and disposed his plate about his person, ready for flight. At the hour of midnight, when Brig Place was buried in slumber, and Mrs. MacStinger was lulled in sweet oblivion, with her infants around her, the guilty captain, stealing down on tiptoe in the dark, opened the door, closed it softly after him, and took to his heels.

Pursued by the image of Mrs. MacStinger springing out of bed, and, regardless of costume, following and bringing him back; pursued also by a consciousness of his enormous crime; Captain Cuttle held on at a great pace, and allowed no grass to grow under his feet between Brig Place and the instrument-maker's door. It opened when he knocked—for Rob was on the watch—and, when it was bolted and locked behind him, Captain Cuttle felt comparatively safe.

"Whew!" cried the captain, looking round him. "It's a breather!"

"Nothing the matter, is there, captain?" cried the gaping Rob.

"No, no!" said Captain Cuttle after changing colour, and listening to a passing footstep in the street. "But mind ye, my lad; if any lady, except either of them two as you see t'other day, ever comes and asks for Captain Cuttle, be sure to report no person of that name known, nor never heard of here observe them orders, will you?"

"I'll take care, captain," returned Rob.

"You might say—if you liked," hesitated the captain, "that you read in the paper that a cap'en of that name was gone to Australia,

emigrating along with a whole ship's complement of people as had all sworn never to come back no more."

Rob nodded his understanding of these instructions; and Captain Cuttle, promising to make a man of him if he obeyed orders, dismissed him, yawning, to his bed under the counter, and went aloft to the chamber of Solomon Gills.

What the captain suffered next day, whenever a bonnet passed, or how often he darted out of the shop to elude imaginary MacStingers, and sought safety in the attic, cannot be told. But, to avoid the fatigues attendant on this means of self-preservation, the captain curtained the glass door of communication between the shop and parlour on the inside, fitted a key to it from the bunch that had been sent to him; and cut a small hole of espial in the wall. The advantage of this fortification is obvious. On a bonnet appearing, the captain instantly slipped into his garison, locked himself up, and took a secret observation of the enemy. Finding it a false alarm, the captain instantly slipped out again. And the bonnets in the streets were so very numerous, and alarms were so inseparable from their appearance, that the captain was almost incessantly slipping in and out all day long.

Captain Cuttle found time, however, in the midst of this fatiguing service, to inspect the stock; in connection with which he had the general idea (very laborious to Rob) that too much friction could not be bestowed upon it, and that it could not be made too bright. He also ticketed a few attractive-looking articles at a venture, at prices ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds; and exposed them in the window, to the great astonishment of the public.

After effecting these improvements, Captain Cuttle, surrounded by the instruments, began to feel scientific: and looked up at the stars at night through the sky-light, when he was smoking his pipe in the little back-parlour before going to bed, as if he had established a kind of property in them. As a tradesman in the City, too, he began to have an interest in the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs, and in public companies; and felt bound to read the quotations of the Funds every day, though he was unable to make out, on any principle of navigation, what the figures meant, and could have very well dispensed with the fractions. Florence the captain waited on, with the strange news of Uncle Sol, immediately after taking possession of the Midshipman; but she was away from home. So the captain sat himself down in his altered station of life, with no company but Rob the Grinder: and losing

count of time, as men do when great changes come upon them, thought musingly of Walter, and of Solomon Gills, and even of Mrs MacStinger herself, as among the things that had been

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHADOWS OF THE PAST AND FUTURE.

YOUR most obedient, sir," said the major. "Damme, sir, a friend of my friend Dombey's is a friend of mine, and I'm glad to see you.

"I am infinitely obliged, Carker," explained Mr. Dombey, "to Major Bagstock for his company and conversation. Major Bagstock has rendered me great service. Carker."

Mr. Carker the manager, hat in hand, just arrived at Leamington, and just introduced to the major, showed the major his whole double range of teeth, and trusted he might take the liberty of thanking him with all his heart for having effected so great an improvement in Mr. Dombey's looks and spirits.

"By Gad, sir," said the major in reply, "there are no thanks due to me, for it's a give-and-take affair. A great creature like our friend Dombey, sir," said the major, lowering his voice, but not lowering it so much as to render it inaudible to that gentleman, "cannot help improving and exalting his friends. He strengthens and invigorates a man, sir, does Dombey, in his moral nature."

Mr. Carker snapped at the expression: In his moral nature. Exactly. The very words he had been on the point of suggesting.

"But when my friend Dombey, sir," added the major, "talks to you of Major Bagstock, I must crave leave to set him and you right. He means plain Joe, sir—Joey B.—Josh Bagstock—Joseph—rough and tough old J., sir. At your service."

Mr. Carker's excessively friendly inclinations towards the major, and Mr. Carker's admiration of his roughness, toughness, and plainness, gleamed out of every tooth in Mr. Carker's head.

"And now, sir," said the major, "you and Dombey have the devil's own amount of business to talk over."

"By no means, major," observed Mr. Dombey.

"Dombey," said the major defiantly, "I know better; a man of your mark—the Colossus

of commerce—is not to be interrupted. Your moments are precious. We shall meet at dinner-time. In the interval old Joseph will be scarce. The dinner hour is a sharp seven, Mr. Carker."

With that, the major, greatly swollen as to his face, withdrew; but immediately putting in his head at the door again, said:

"I beg your pardon. Dombey, have you any message to 'em?"

Mr. Dombey, in some embarrassment, and not without a glance at the courteous keeper of his business confidence, intrusted the major with his compliments.

"By the Lord, sir," said the major, "you must make it something warmer than that, or old Joe will be far from welcome."

"Regards then, if you will, major," returned Mr. Dombey.

"Damme, sir," said the major, shaking his shoulders and his great cheeks jocularly: "make it something warmer than that."

"What you please, then, major," observed Mr. Dombey.

"Our friend is sly, sir, sly, sir, de-vilish sly," said the major, staring round the door at Carker. "So is Bagstock." But stopping in the midst of a chuckle, and drawing himself up to his full height, the major solemnly exclaimed, as he struck himself on the chest, "Dombey! I envy your feelings. God bless you!" and withdrew.

"You must have found the gentleman a great resource," said Carker, following him with his teeth.

"Very great indeed," said Mr. Dombey.

"He has friends here, no doubt," pursued Carker. "I perceive, from what he has said, that you go into society here. Do you know," smiling horribly, "I am so very glad that you go into society!"

Mr. Dombey acknowledged this display of interest on the part of his second in command by twirling his watch-chain, and slightly moving his head.

"You were formed for society," said Carker. "Of all the men I know, you are the best adapted by nature and by position for society. Do you know, I have been frequently amazed that you should have held it at arm's length so long!"

"I have had my reasons, Carker. I have been alone, and indifferent to it. But you have great social qualifications yourself, and are the more likely to have been surprised."

"Oh! I!" returned the other with ready self-disparagement. "It's quite another matter

in the case of a man like me. I don't come into comparison with *you*."

Mr. Dombey put his hand to his neckcloth, settled his chin in it, coughed, and stood looking at his faithful friend and servant for a few moments in silence.

"I shall have the pleasure, Carker," said Mr. Dombey at length: making as if he swallowed something a little too large for his throat: "to present you to my—to the major's friends. Highly agreeable people."

"Ladies among them, I presume?" insinuated the smooth manager.

"They are all—that is to say, they are both—ladies," replied Mr. Dombey.

"Only two?" smiled Carker.

"There are only two. I have confined my visits to their residence, and have made no other acquaintance here."

"Sisters, perhaps?" quoth Carker.

"Mother and daughter," replied Mr. Dombey.

As Mr. Dombey dropped his eyes, and adjusted his neckcloth again, the smiling face of Mr. Carker the manager became in a moment, and without any stage of transition, transformed into a most intent and frowning face, scanning his closely, and with an ugly sneer. As Mr. Dombey raised his eyes, it changed back, no less quickly, to its old expression, and showed him every gum of which it stood possessed.

"You are very kind," said Carker. "I shall be delighted to know them. Speaking of daughters, I have seen Miss Dombey."

There was a sudden rush of blood to Mr. Dombey's face.

"I took the liberty of waiting on her," said Carker, "to inquire if she could charge me with any little commission. I am not so fortunate as to be the bearer of any but her—but her dear love."

Wolf's face that it was then, with even the hot tongue revealing itself through the stretched mouth, as the eyes encountered Mr. Dombey's!

"What business intelligence is there?" inquired the latter gentleman after a silence, during which Mr. Carker had produced some memoranda and other papers.

"There is very little," returned Carker. "Upon the whole, we have not had our usual good fortune of late, but that is of little moment to you. At Lloyd's they give up the Son and Heir for lost. Well, she was insured from her keel to her masthead."

"Carker," said Mr. Dombey, taking a chair near him, "I cannot say that young man, Gay, ever impressed me favourably—"

"Nor me," interposed the manager.

"—But I wish," said Mr. Dombey, without heeding the interruption, "he had never gone on board that ship. I wish he had never been sent out."

"It is a pity you didn't say so in good time, is it not?" retorted Carker coolly. "However, I think it's all for the best: I really think it's all for the best. Did I mention that there was something like a little confidence between Miss Dombey and myself?"

"No," said Mr. Dombey sternly.

"I have no doubt," returned Mr. Carker after an impressive pause, "that, wherever Gay is, he is much better where he is than at home here. If I were, or could be, in your place, I should be satisfied of that. I am quite satisfied of it myself. Miss Dombey is confiding and young—perhaps hardly proud enough for your daughter—if she have a fault. Not that that is much, though, I am sure. Will you check these balances with me?"

Mr. Dombey leaned back in his chair, instead of bending over the papers that were laid before him, and looked the manager steadily in the face. The manager, with his eyelids slightly raised, affected to be glancing at his figures, and to await the leisure of his principal. He showed that he affected this, as if from great delicacy, and with a design to spare Mr. Dombey's feelings; and the latter, as he looked at him, was cognizant of his intended consideration, and felt that, but for it, this confidential Carker would have said a great deal more, which he, Mr. Dombey, was too proud to ask for. It was his way in business, often. Little by little, Mr. Dombey's gaze relaxed, and his attention became diverted to the papers before him; but, while busy with the occupation they afforded him, he frequently stopped, and looked at Mr. Carker again. Whenever he did so, Mr. Carker was demonstrative, as before, in his delicacy, and impressed it on his great chief more and more.

While they were thus engaged; and, under the skilful culture of the manager, angry thoughts in reference to poor Florence brooded and bred in Mr. Dombey's breast, usurping the place of the cold dislike that generally reigned there; Major Bagstock, much admired by the old ladies of Leamington, and followed by the native, carrying the usual amount of light baggage, straddled along the shady side of the way, to make a morning call on Mrs. Skewton. It being mid-day when the major reached the bower of Cleopatra, he had the good fortune to find his princess on her usual sofa, languishing over a cup of coffee, with the room so darkened

and shaded for her more luxurious repose, that Withers, who was in attendance on her, loomed like a phantom page.

"What insupportable creature is this coming in?" said Mrs. Skewton. "I cannot bear it. Go away, whoever you are!"

"You have not the heart to banish J. B., ma'am!" said the major, halting midway to remonstrate, with his cane over his shoulder.

"Oh, it's you, is it? On second thoughts, you may enter," observed Cleopatra.

The major entered accordingly, and advancing to the sofa, pressed her charming hand to his lips.

"Sit down," said Cleopatra, listlessly waving her fan, "a long way off. Don't come too near me, for I am frightfully faint and sensitive this morning, and you smell of the sun. You are absolutely tropical."

"By George, ma'am," said the major, "the time has been when Joseph Bagstock has been grilled and blistered by the sun; the time was when he was forced, ma'am, into such full blow, by high hothouse heat in the West Indies, that he was known as the Flower. A man never heard of Bagstock, ma'am, in those days; he heard of the Flower—the Flower of Ours. The Flower may have faded; more or less, ma'am," observed the major, dropping into a much nearer chair than had been indicated by his cruel divinity, "but it is a tough plant yet, and constant as the evergreen."

Here the major, under cover of the dark room, shut up one eye, rolled his head like a harlequin, and, in his great self-satisfaction, perhaps, went nearer to the confines of apoplexy than he had ever gone before.

"Where is Mrs. Granger?" inquired Cleopatra of her page.

Withers believed she was in her own room.

"Very well," said Mrs. Skewton. "Go away, and shut the door. I am engaged."

As Withers disappeared, Mrs. Skewton turned her head languidly towards the major, without otherwise moving, and asked him how his friend was.

"Dombey, ma'am," returned the major, with a facetious gurgling in his throat, "is as well as a man in his condition *can* be. His condition is a desperate one, ma'am. He is touched, is Dombey. Touched!" cried the major. "He is bayoneted through the body."

Cleopatra cast a sharp look at the major, that contrasted forcibly with the affected drawl in which she presently said:—

"Major Bagstock, although I know but little of the world,—nor can I really regret my inex-

perience, for I fear it is a false place: full of withering conventionalities: where nature is but little regarded, and where the music of the heart, and the gushing of the soul, and all that sort of thing, which is so truly poetical, is seldom heard,—I cannot misunderstand your meaning. There is an allusion to Edith—to my extremely dear child," said Mrs. Skewton, tracing the outline of her eyebrows with her forefinger, "in your words, to which the tenderest of chords vibrates excessively!"

"Bluntness, ma'am," returned the major, "has ever been the characteristic of the Bagstock breed. You are right. Joe admits it."

"And that allusion," pursued Cleopatra, "would involve one of the most—if not positively *the* most touching, and thrilling, and sacred emotions of which our sadly-fallen nature is susceptible, I conceive."

The major laid his hand upon his lips, and wafted a kiss to Cleopatra, as if to identify the emotion in question.

"I feel that I am weak. I feel that I am wanting in that energy which should sustain a mamma: not to say a parent: on such a subject," said Mrs. Skewton, trimming her lips with the laced edge of her pocket-handkerchief; "but I can hardly approach a topic so excessively momentous to my dearest Edith without a feeling of faintness. Nevertheless, bad man, as you have boldly remarked upon it, and as it has occasioned me great anguish:" Mrs. Skewton touched her left side with her fan: "I will not shrink from my duty."

The major, under cover of the dimness, swelled, and swelled, and rolled his purple face about, and winked his lobster eye, until he fell into a fit of wheezing, which obliged him to rise and take a turn or two about the room, before his fair friend could proceed.

"Mr. Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, when she at length resumed, "was obliging enough, now many weeks ago, to do us the honour of visiting us here; in company, my dear major, with yourself. I acknowledge—let me be open—that it is my failing to be the creature of impulse, and to wear my heart, as it were, outside. I know my failing full well. My enemy cannot know it better. But I am not penitent; I would rather not be frozen by the heartless world, and am content to bear this imputation justly."

Mrs. Skewton arranged her tucker, pinched her wiry throat to give it a soft surface, and went on with great complacency.

"It gave me (my dearest Edith too, I am sure) infinite pleasure to receive Mr. Dombey. As a

friend of yours, my dear major, we were naturally disposed to be prepossessed in his favour; and I fancy that I observed an amount of heart in Mr. Dombey, that was excessively refreshing."

"There is devilish little heart in Dombey now, ma'am," said the major.

"Wretched man!" cried Mrs. Skewton, looking at him languidly, "pray be silent."

"J. B. is dumb, ma'am," said the major.

"Mr. Dombey," pursued Cleopatra, smoothing the rosy hue upon her cheeks, "accordingly repeated his visit; and possibly finding some attraction in the simplicity and primitiveness of our tastes—for there is always a charm in Nature—it is so very sweet—became one of our little circle every evening. Little did I think of the awful responsibility into which I plunged when I encouraged Mr. Dombey—to——"

"To beat up these quarters, ma'am," suggested Major Bagstock.

"Coarse person!" said Mrs. Skewton, "you anticipate my meaning, though in odious language."

Here Mrs. Skewton rested her elbow on the little table at her side, and suffering her wrist to droop in what she considered a graceful and becoming manner, dangled her fan to and fro, and lazily admired her hand while speaking.

"The agony I have endured," she said mincingly, "as the truth has by degrees dawned upon me, has been too exceedingly terrific to dilate upon. My whole existence is bound up in my sweetest Edith; and to see her change from day to day—my beautiful pet, who has positively garnered up her heart since the death of that most delightful creature, Granger—is the most affecting thing in the world."

Mrs. Skewton's world was not a very trying one, if one might judge of it by the influence of its most affecting circumstance upon her; but this by the way.

"Edith," simpered Mrs. Skewton, "who is the perfect pearl of my life, is said to resemble me. I believe we *are* alike."

"There is one man in the world who never will admit that any one resembles you, ma'am," said the major; "and that man's name is old Joe Bagstock."

Cleopatra made as if she would brain the flatterer with her fan, but relenting, smiled upon him and proceeded:

"If my charming girl inherits any advantages from me, wicked one!"—the major was the wicked one—"she inherits also my foolish nature. She has great force of character—mine has been said to be immense, though I don't believe it—but once moved, she is sus-

ceptible and sensitive to the last extent. What are my feelings when I see her pining! They destroy me."

The major, advancing his double chin, and pursing up his blue lips into a soothing expression, affected the profoundest sympathy.

"The confidence," said Mrs. Skewton, "that has subsisted between us—the free development of soul, and openness of sentiment—is touching to think of. We have been more like sisters than mamma and child."

"J. B.'s own sentiment," observed the major, "expressed by J. B. fifty thousand times!"

"Do not interrupt, rude man!" said Cleopatra. "What are my feelings, then, when I find that there is one subject avoided by us! That there is a what's-his-name—a gulf—opened between us! That my own artless Edith is changed to me! They are of the most poignant description, of course."

The major left his chair, and took one nearer to the little table.

"From day to day I see this, my dear major," proceeded Mrs. Skewton. "From day to day I feel this. From hour to hour I reproach myself for that excess of faith and trustfulness which has led to such distressing consequences; and almost from minute to minute I hope that Mr. Dombey may explain himself, and relieve the torture I undergo, which is extremely wearing. But nothing happens, my dear major. I am the slave of remorse—take care of the coffee-cup: you are so very awkward—my darling Edith is an altered being; and I really don't see what is to be done, or what good creature I can advise with."

Major Bagstock, encouraged, perhaps, by the softened and confidential tone into which Mrs. Skewton, after several times lapsing into it for a moment, seemed now to have subsided for good, stretched out his hand across the little table, and said with a leer,

"Advise with Joe, ma'am."

"Then, you aggravating monster," said Cleopatra, giving one hand to the major, and tapping his knuckles with her fan, which she held in the other, "why don't you talk to me? You know what I mean. Why don't You tell me something to the purpose?"

The major laughed, and kissed the hand she had bestowed upon him, and laughed again immensely.

"Is there as much Heart in Mr. Dombey as I gave him credit for?" languished Cleopatra tenderly. "Do you think he is in earnest, my dear major? Would you recommend his being spoken to, or his being left alone? Now

tell me, like a dear man, what you would advise."

"Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, ma'am?" chuckled the major hoarsely.

"Mysterious creature!" returned Cleopatra, bringing her fan to bear upon the major's nose.

"How can we marry him?"

"Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, ma'am, I say?" chuckled the major again.

Mrs. Skewton returned no answer in words, but smiled upon the major with so much archness and vivacity, that that gallant officer, considering himself challenged, would have imprinted a kiss on her exceedingly red lips, but for her interposing the fan with a very winning and juvenile dexterity. It might have been in modesty; it might have been in apprehension of some danger to their bloom.

"Dombey, ma'am," said the major, "is a great catch."

"Oh, mercenary wretch!" cried Cleopatra with a little shriek, "I am shocked."

"And Dombey, ma'am," pursued the major, thrusting forward his head, and distending his eyes, "is in earnest. Joseph says it; Bagstock knows it; J. B. keeps him to the mark. Leave Dombey to himself, ma'am. Dombey is safe, ma'am. Do as you have done; do no more; and trust to J. B. for the end."

"You really think so, my dear major?" returned Cleopatra, who had eyed him very cautiously, and very searchingly, in spite of her listless bearing.

"Sure of it, ma'am," rejoined the major. "Cleopatra the peerless, and her Antony Bagstock, will often speak of this triumphantly, when sharing the elegance and wealth of Edith Dombey's establishment. Dombey's right-hand man, ma'am," said the major, stopping abruptly in a chuckle, and becoming serious, "has arrived."

"This morning?" said Cleopatra.

"This morning, ma'am," returned the major. "And Dombey's anxiety for his arrival, ma'am, is to be referred—take J. B.'s word for this, for Joe is devilish sly—the major tapped his nose, and screwed up one of his eyes tight; which did not enhance his native beauty—"to his desire that what is in the wind should become known to him, without Dombey's telling and consulting him. For Dombey is as proud, ma'am," said the major, "as Lucifer."

"A charming quality," lisped Mrs. Skewton; "reminding one of dearest Edith."

"Well, ma'am," said the major, "I have thrown out hints already, and the right-hand man understands 'em; and I'll throw out more

before the day is done. Dombey projected this morning a ride to Warwick Castle, and to Kenilworth, to-morrow, to be preceded by a breakfast with us. I undertook the delivery of this invitation. Will you honour us: so far, ma'am?" said the major, swelling with shortness of breath and slowness, as he produced a note, addressed to the Honourable Mrs. Skewton, by favour of Major Bagstock, wherein hers ever faithfully, Paul Dombey, besought her and her amiable and accomplished daughter to consent to the proposed excursion; and in a post-script unto which, the same ever faithfully Paul Dombey entreated to be recalled to the remembrance of Mrs. Granger.

"Hush!" said Cleopatra suddenly, "Edith!"

The loving mother can scarcely be described as resuming her insipid and affected air when she made this exclamation; for she had never cast it off; nor was it likely that she ever would or could, in any other place than in the grave. But hurriedly dismissing whatever shadow of earnestness, or faint confession of a purpose, laudable or wicked, that her face, or voice, or manner, had, for the moment, betrayed, she lounged upon the couch, her most insipid and most languid self again, as Edith entered the room.

Edith, so beautiful and stately, but so cold and so repelling. Who, slightly acknowledging the presence of Major Bagstock, and directing a keen glance at her mother, drew back the curtain from a window, and sat down there, looking out.

"My dearest Edith," said Mrs. Skewton, "where on earth have you been? I have wanted you, my love, most sadly."

"You said you were engaged, and I stayed away," she answered, without turning her head.

"It was cruel to old Joe, ma'am," said the major in his gallantry.

"It was very cruel, I know," she said, still looking out—and said with such calm disdain that the major was discomfited, and could think of nothing in reply.

"Major Bagstock, my darling Edith," drawled her mother, "who is generally the most useless and disagreeable creature in the world: as you know—"

"It is surely not worth while, mamma," said Edith, looking round, "to observe these forms of speech. We are quite alone. We know each other."

The quiet scorn that sat upon her handsome face—a scorn that evidently lighted on herself, no less than them—was so intense and deep, that her mother's simper, for the instant,

though of a hardy constitution, drooped before it.

"My darling girl——" she began again.

"Not woman yet?" said Edith with a smile.

"How very odd you are to-day, my dear! Pray let me say, my love, that Major Bagstock has brought the kindest of notes from Mr. Dombey, proposing that we should breakfast with him to-morrow, and ride to Warwick and Kenilworth. Will you go, Edith?"

"Will I go?" she repeated, turning very red, and breathing quickly as she looked round at her mother.

"I knew you would, my own," observed the latter carelessly. "It is, as you say, quite a form to ask. Here is Mr. Dombey's letter, Edith."

"Thank you. I have no desire to read it," was her answer.

"Then perhaps I had better answer it myself," said Mrs. Skewton, "though I had thought of asking *you* to be my secretary, darling." As Edith made no movement and no answer, Mrs. Skewton begged the major to wheel her little table nearer, and to set open the desk it contained, and to take out pen and paper for her; all which congenial offices of gallantry the major discharged with much submission and devotion.

"Your regards, Edith, my dear?" said Mrs. Skewton, pausing, pen in hand, at the post-script.

"What you will, mamma," she answered, without turning her head, and with supreme indifference.

Mrs. Skewton wrote what she would, without seeking for any more explicit directions, and handed her letter to the major, who, receiving it as a precious charge, made a show of laying it near his heart, but was fain to put it in the pocket of his pantaloons on account of the insecurity of his waistcoat. The major then took a very polished and chivalrous farewell of both ladies, which the elder one acknowledged in her usual manner; while the younger, sitting with her face addressed to the window, bent her head so slightly that it would have been a greater compliment to the major to have made no sign at all, and to have left him to infer that he had not been heard or thought of.

"As to alteration in her, sir," mused the major, on his way back; on which expedition—the afternoon being sunny and hot—he ordered the native and the light baggage to the front, and walked in the shadow of that expatriated prince: "as to alteration, sir, and pining, and so forth, that won't go down with Joseph Bagstock. None of that, sir. It won't do here.

But as to there being something of a division between 'em—or a gulf, as the mother calls it—damme, sir, that seems true 'enough. And it's odd enough! Well, sir!" panted the major, "Edith Granger and Dombey are well matched; let 'em fight it out! Bagstock backs the winner."

The major, by saying these latter words aloud, in the vigour of his thoughts, caused the unhappy native to stop, and turn round, in the belief that he was personally addressed. Exasperated to the last degree by this act of insubordination, the major (though he was swelling with enjoyment of his own humour at the mo-



"THANK YOU. I HAVE NO DESIRE TO READ IT," WAS HER ANSWER.

ment of its occurrence) instantly thrust his cane among the native's ribs, and continued to stir him up at short intervals, all the way to the hotel.

Nor was the major less exasperated as he

dressed for dinner, during which operation the dark servant underwent the pelting of a shower of miscellaneous objects, varying in size from a boot to a hair-brush, and including everything that came within his master's reach. For the

major plumed himself on having the native in a perfect state of drill, and visited the least departure from strict discipline with this kind of fatigue duty. Add to this that he maintained the native about his person as a counter-irritant against the gout, and all other vexations, mental as well as bodily; and the native would appear to have earned his pay—which was not large.

At length the major, having disposed of all the missiles that were convenient to his hand, and having called the native so many new names as must have given him great occasion to marvel at the resources of the English language, submitted to have his cravat put on; and being dressed, and finding himself in a brisk flow of spirits after this exercise, went down-stairs to enliven "Dombey" and his right-hand man.

Dombey was not yet in the room, but the right-hand man was there, and his dental treasures were, as usual, ready for the major.

"Well, sir!" said the major. "How have you passed the time since I had the happiness of meeting you? Have you walked at all?"

"A saunter of barely half an hour's duration," returned Carker. "We have been so much occupied."

"Business, eh?" said the major.

"A variety of little matters necessary to be gone through," replied Carker. "But do you know—this is quite unusual with me, educated in a distrustful school, and who am not generally disposed to be communicative," he said, breaking off, and speaking in a charming tone of frankness—"but I feel quite confidential with you, Major Bagstock."

"You do me honour, sir," returned the major. "You may be."

"Do you know, then," pursued Carker, "that I have not found my friend—*our* friend, I ought rather to call him—"

"Meaning Dombey, sir?" cried the major. "You see me, Mr. Carker, standing here! J. B.?"

He was puffy enough to see, and blue enough; and Mr. Carker intimated that he had that pleasure.

"Then you see a man, sir, who would go through fire and water to serve Dombey," returned Major Bagstock.

Mr. Carker smiled, and said he was sure of it. "Do you know, major," he proceeded: "to resume where I left off: that I have not found our friend so attentive to business to-day as usual?"

"No?" observed the delighted major.

"I have found him a little abstracted, and

with his attention disposed to wander," said Carker.

"By Jove, sir," cried the major, "there's a lady in the case."

"Indeed I begin to believe there really is," returned Carker. "I thought you might be jesting when you seemed to hint at it for I know you military men—"

The major gave the horse's cough, and shook his head and shoulders, as much as to say, "Well! we *are* gay dogs, there's no denying." He then seized Mr. Carker by the button-hole, and with starting eyes whispered in his ear that she was a woman of extraordinary charms, sir. That she was a young widow, sir. That she was of a fine family, sir. That Dombey was over head and ears in love with her, sir, and that it would be a good match on both sides; for she had beauty, blood, and talent, and Dombey had fortune; and what more could any couple have? Hearing Mr. Dombey's footsteps without, the major cut himself short by saying that Mr. Carker would see her to-morrow morning, and would judge for himself; and between his mental excitement, and the exertion of saying all this in wheezy whispers, the major sat gurgling in the throat, and watering at the eyes until dinner was ready.

The major, like some other noble animals, exhibited himself to great advantage at feeding-time. On this occasion he shone resplendent at one end of the table, supported by the milder lustre of Mr. Dombey at the other; while Carker on one side lent his ray to either light, or suffered it to merge into both, as occasion arose.

During the first course or two the major was usually grave; for the native, in obedience to general orders, secretly issued, collected every sauce and cruet round him, and gave him a great deal to do in taking out the stoppers, and mixing up the contents in his plate. Besides which, the native had private zests and flavours on a side-table, with which the major daily scorched himself; to say nothing of strange machines out of which he spouted unknown liquors into the major's drink. But on this occasion, Major Bagstock, even amidst these many occupations, found time to be social; and his sociality consisted in excessive slyness for the behoof of Mr. Carker, and the betrayal of Mr. Dombey's state of mind.

"Dombey," said the major, "you don't eat. What's the matter?"

"Thank you," returned that gentleman, "I am doing very well; I have no great appetite to-day."

"Why, Dombey, what's become of it?" asked the major. "Where's it gone? You haven't left it with our friends, I'll swear, for I can answer for their having none to-day at luncheon. I can answer for one of 'em, at least: I won't say which."

Then the major winked at Carker, and became so frightfully sly, that his dark attendant was obliged to pat him on the back, without orders, or he would probably have disappeared under the table.

In a later stage of the dinner: that is to say, when the native stood at the major's elbow, ready to serve the first bottle of champagne: the major became still slier.

"Fill this to the brim, you scoundrel," said the major, holding up his glass. "Fill Mr. Carker's to the brim too. And Mr. Dombey's too. By Gad, gentlemen," said the major, winking at his new friend, while Mr. Dombey looked into his plate with a conscious air, "we'll consecrate this glass of wine to a divinity whom Joe is proud to know, and at a distance humbly and reverently to admire. "Edith," said the major, "is her name; angelic Edith!"

"To angelic Edith!" cried the smiling Carker.

"Edith, by all means," said Mr. Dombey.

The entrance of the waiters with new dishes caused the major to be slier yet, but in a more serious vein. "For though, among ourselves, Joe Bagstock mingles jest and earnest on this subject, sir," said the major, laying his finger on his lips, and speaking half apart to Carker, "he holds that name too sacred to be made the property of these fellows, or of any fellows. Not a word, sir, while they are here!"

This was respectful and becoming on the major's part, and Mr. Dombey plainly felt it so. Although embarrassed, in his own frigid way, by the major's allusions, Mr. Dombey had no objection to such rallying, it was clear, but rather courted it. Perhaps the major had been pretty near the truth when he had divined, that morning, that the great man who was too haughty formally to consult with or confide in his prime minister on such a matter, yet wished him to be fully possessed of it. Let this be how it may, he often glanced at Mr. Carker while the major plied his light artillery, and seemed watchful of its effect upon him.

But the major, having secured an attentive listener, and a smiler who had not his match in all the world—"in short, a de-vilish intelligent and agreeable fellow," as he often afterwards declared—was not going to let him off with a little slyness personal to Mr. Dombey. There-

fore, on the removal of the cloth, the major developed himself as a choice spirit in the broader and more comprehensive range of narrating regimental stories, and cracking regimental jokes, which he did with such prodigal exuberance, that Carker was (or feigned to be) quite exhausted with laughter and admiration: while Mr. Dombey looked on over his starched cravat, like the major's proprietor, or like a stately showman who was glad to see his bear dancing well.

When the major was too hoarse with meat and drink, and the display of his social powers, to render himself intelligible any longer, they adjourned to coffee. After which, the major inquired of Mr. Carker the manager, with little apparent hope of an answer in the affirmative, if he played piquet.

"Yes, I play piquet a little," said Mr. Carker.

"Backgammon, perhaps?" observed the major, hesitating.

"Yes, I play backgammon a little too," replied the man of teeth.

"Carker plays at all games, I believe," said Mr. Dombey, laying himself on a sofa like a man of wood without a hinge or a joint in him: "and plays them well."

In sooth, he played the two in question to such perfection, that the major was astonished, and asked him, at random, if he played chess.

"Yes, I play chess a little," answered Carker.

"I have sometimes played, and won a game—it's a mere trick—without seeing the board."

"By Gad, sir!" said the major, staring, "you're a contrast to Dombey, who plays nothing."

"Oh! *He!*" returned the manager. "*He* has never had occasion to acquire such little arts. To men like me they are sometimes useful. As at present, Major Bagstock, when they enable me to take a hand with you."

It might be only the false mouth, so smooth and wide; and yet there seemed to lurk, beneath the humility and subserviency of this short speech, a something like a snarl; and, for a moment, one might have thought that the white teeth were prone to bite the hand they fawned upon. But the major thought nothing about it; and Mr. Dombey lay meditating, with his eyes half shut, during the whole of the play, which lasted until bedtime.

By that time, Mr. Carker, though the winner, had mounted high into the major's good opinion, inasmuch that when he left the major at his own room before going to bed, the major, as a special attention, sent the native—who always rested on a mattress spread upon the ground at his mas-

ter's door—along the gallery, to light him to his room in state.

There was a faint blur on the surface of the mirror in Mr. Carke's chamber, and it's reflection was, perhaps, a false one. But it showed, that night, the image of a man who saw, in his fancy, a crowd of people slumbering on the ground at his feet, like the poor native at his master's door: who picked his way among them: looking down maliciously enough: but trod upon no upturned face—as yet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEEPER SHADOWS.

MR. CARKEK the manager rose with the lark, and went out walking in the summer day. His meditations—and he meditated with contracted brows while he strolled along—hardly seemed to soar as high as the lark, or to mount in that direction; rather they kept close to their nest upon the earth, and looked about among the dust and worms. But there was not a bird in the air, singing unseen, farther beyond the reach of human eye than Mr. Carke's thoughts. He had his face so perfectly under control, that few could say more, in distinct terms, of its expression, than that it smiled or that it pondered. It pondered now, intently. As the lark rose higher, he sank deeper in thought. As the lark poured out her melody clearer and stronger, he fell into a graver and profounder silence. At length, when the lark came headlong down, with an accumulating stream of song, and dropped among the green wheat near him, rippling in the breath of the morning like a river, he sprang up from his reverie, and looked round with a sudden smile, as courteous and soft as if he had had numerous observers to propitiate; nor did he relapse after being thus awakened; but clearing his face, like one who bethought himself that it might otherwise wrinkle and tell tales, went smiling on, as if for practice.

Perhaps with an eye to first impressions, Mr. Carke was very carefully and trimly dressed that morning. Though always somewhat formal in his dress, in imitation of the great man whom he served, he stopped short of the extent of Mr. Dombey's stiffness: at once, perhaps, because he knew it to be ludicrous, and because, in doing so, he found another means of expressing his sense of the difference and distance between

them. Some people quoted him, indeed, in this respect, as a pointed commentary, and not a flattering one, on his icy patron—but the world is prone to misconstruction, and Mr. Carke was not accountable for its bad propensity.

Clean and florid: with his light complexion fading, as it were, in the sun, and his dainty step enhancing the softness of the turf: Mr. Carke the manager strolled about meadows and green lanes, and glided among avenues of trees, until it was time to return to breakfast. Taking a nearer way back, Mr. Carke pursued it, airing his teeth, and said aloud as he did so, "Now to see the second Mrs. Dombey!"

He had strolled beyond the town, and re-entered it by a pleasant walk, where there was a deep shade of leafy trees, and where there were a few benches here and there for those who chose to rest. It not being a place of general resort at any hour, and wearing, at that time of the still morning, the air of being quite deserted and retired, Mr. Carke had it, or thought he had it, all to himself. So, with the whim of an idle man, to whom there yet remained twenty minutes for reaching a destination easily accessible in ten, Mr. Carke threaded the great boles of the trees, and went passing in and out, before this one and behind that, weaving a chain of footsteps on the dewy ground.

But he found he was mistaken in supposing there was no one in the grove; for, as he softly rounded the trunk of one large tree, on which the obdurate bark was knotted and overlapped like the hide of a rhinoceros or some kindred monster of the ancient days before the flood, he saw an unexpected figure sitting on a bench near at hand, about which, in another moment, he would have wound the chain he was making.

It was that of a lady elegantly dressed and very handsome, whose dark proud eyes were fixed upon the ground, and in whom some passion or struggle was raging. For, as she sat looking down, she held a corner of her under lip within her mouth, her bosom heaved, her nostril quivered, her head trembled, indignant tears were on her cheek, and her foot was set upon the moss as though she would have crushed it into nothing. And yet almost the selfsame glance that showed him this, showed him the selfsame lady rising with a scornful air of weariness and lassitude, and turning away with nothing expressed in face or figure but careless beauty and imperious disdain.

A withered and very ugly old woman, dressed not so much like a gipsy as like any of that medley race of vagabonds who tramp about the country, begging, and stealing, and unkering,

and weaving rushes, by turns, or all together, had been observing the lady too; for, as she rose, this second figure, strangely confronting the first, scrambled up from the ground—out of it, it almost appeared—and stood in the way.

"Let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady," said the old woman, munching with her jaws, as if the Death's head beneath her yellow skin were impatient to get out.

"I can tell it for myself," was the reply.

"Ay, ay, pretty lady; but not right. You didn't tell it right when you were sitting there. I see you! Give me a piece of silver, pretty lady, and I'll tell your fortune true. There's riches, pretty lady, in your face."

"I know," returned the lady, passing her with a dark smile and a proud step. "I knew it before."

"What! You won't give me nothing?" cried the old woman. "You won't give me nothing to tell your fortune, pretty lady? How much will you give me *not* to tell it, then? Give me something, or I'll call it after you!" croaked the old woman passionately.

Mr. Carker, whom the lady was about to pass close, slinking against his tree as she crossed to gain the path, advanced so as to meet her, and pulling off his hat as she went by, bade the old woman hold her peace. The lady acknowledged his interference with an inclination of the head, and went her way.

"You give me something, then, or I'll call it after her!" screamed the old woman, throwing up her arms, and pressing forward against his outstretched hand. "Or come," she added, dropping her voice suddenly, looking at him earnestly, and seeming in a moment to forget the object of her wrath, "give me something, or I'll call it after you!"

"After *me*, old lady!" returned the manager, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Yes," said the woman, steadfast in her scrutiny, and holding out her shrivelled hand. "I know!"

"What do you know?" demanded Carker, throwing her a shilling. "Do *you* know who the handsome lady is?"

Munching like that sailor's wife of yore, who had chestnuts in her lap, and scowling like the witch who asked for some in vain, the old woman picked the shilling up, and going backwards, like a crab, or like a heap of crabs: for her alternately expanding and contracting hands might have represented two of that species, and her creeping face some half-a-dozen more: crouched on the venous root of an old tree, pulled out a short black pipe from within the

crown of her bonnet, lighted it with a match, and smoked in silence, looking fixedly at her questioner.

Mr. Carker laughed and turned upon his heel.

"Good!" said the old woman. "One child dead, and one child living: one wife dead, and one wife coming. Go and meet her!"

In spite of himself, the manager looked round again, and stopped. The old woman, who had not removed her pipe, and was munching and mumbling while she smoked, as if in conversation with an invisible familiar, pointed with her finger in the direction he was going, and laughed.

"What was that you said, Beldamite?" he demanded.

The woman mumbled, and chattered, and smoked, and still pointed before him; but remained silent. Muttering a farewell that was not complimentary, Mr. Carker pursued his way; but as he turned out of that place, and looked over his shoulder at the root of the old tree, he could yet see the finger pointing before him, and thought he heard the woman screaming, "Go and meet her!"

Preparations for a choice repast were completed, he found, at the hotel; and Mr. Dombey, and the major, and the breakfast were awaiting the ladies. Individual constitution has much to do with the development of such facts, no doubt; but, in this case, appetite carried it hollow over the tender passion; Mr. Dombey being very cool and collected, and the major fretting and fuming in a state of violent heat and irritation. At length the door was thrown open by the native, and, after a pause, occupied by her languishing along the gallery, a very blooming, but not very youthful, lady appeared.

"My dear Mr. Dombey," said the lady, "I am afraid we are late, but Edith has been out already, looking for a favourable point of view for a sketch, and kept me waiting for her. Falsest of majors," giving him her little finger, "how do you do?"

"Mrs. Skewton," said Mr. Dombey, "let me gratify my friend Carker"—Mr. Dombey unconsciously emphasized the word friend, as saying, "No, really; I do allow him to take credit for that distinction"—"by presenting him to you. You have heard me mention Mr. Carker."

"I am charmed, I am sure," said Mrs. Skewton graciously.

Mr. Carker was charmed, of course. Would he have been more charmed on Mr. Dombey's behalf, if Mrs. Skewton had been (as he at first supposed her) the Edith whom they had toasted overnight?

"Why, where, for Heaven's sake, is Edith?" exclaimed Mrs. Skewton, looking round. "Still at the door, giving Withers orders about the mounting of those drawings! My dear Mr. Dombey, will you have the kindness——"

Mr. Dombey was already gone to seek her. Next moment he returned, bearing on his arm the same elegantly-dressed and very handsome lady whom Mr. Carker had encountered underneath the trees.

"Carker——" began Mr. Dombey. But their recognition of each other was so manifest, that Mr. Dombey stopped, surprised.

"I am obliged to the gentleman," said Edith with a stately bend, "for sparing me some annoyance from an importunate beggar just now."

"I am obliged to my good fortune," said Mr. Carker, bowing low, "for the opportunity of rendering so slight a service to one whose servant I am proud to be."

As her eye rested on him for an instant, and then lighted on the ground, he saw in its bright and searching glance a suspicion that he had not come up at the moment of his interference, but had secretly observed her sooner. As he saw that, she saw in *his* eye that her distrust was not without foundation.

"Really," cried Mrs. Skewton, who had taken this opportunity of inspecting Mr. Carker through her glass, and satisfying herself (as she lisped audibly to the major) that he was all heart; "really, now, this is one of the most enchanting coincidences that I ever heard of. The idea! My dearest Edith, there is such an obvious destiny in it, that really one might almost be induced to cross one's arms upon one's frock, and say, like those wicked Turks, there is no What's-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!"

Edith declined no revision of this extraordinary quotation from the Koran, but Mr. Dombey felt it necessary to offer a few polite remarks.

"It gives me great pleasure," said Mr. Dombey with cumbrous gallantry, "that a gentleman so nearly connected with myself as Carker is, should have had the honour and happiness of rendering the least assistance to Mrs. Granger." Mr. Dombey bowed to her. "But it gives me some pain, and it occasions me to be really envious of Carker;" he unconsciously laid stress on these words, as sensible that they must appear to involve a very surprising proposition; "envious of Carker, that I had not that honour and that happiness myself." Mr. Dombey bowed again. Edith, saving for a curl of her lip, was motionless.

"By the Lord, sir," cried the major, bursting into speech at sight of the waiter, who was come to announce breakfast, "it's an extraordinary thing to me that no one can have the honour and happiness of shooting all such beggars through the head without being brought to book for it. But here's an arm for Mrs. Granger, if if she'll do J. B. the honour to accept it; and the greatest service Joe can render you, ma'am, just now, is, to lead you in to table."

With this, the major gave his arm to Edith; Mr. Dombey led the way with Mrs. Skewton; Mr. Carker went last, smiling on the party.

"I am quite rejoiced, Mr. Carker," said the lady mother at breakfast, after another approving survey of him through her glass, "that you have timed your visit so happily as to go with us to-day. It is the most enchanting expedition!"

"Any expedition would be enchanting in such society," returned Carker; "but I believe it is, in itself, full of interest."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Skewton with a faded little scream of rapture, "the Castle is charming!—associations of the middle ages—and all that—which is so truly exquisite. Don't you dote upon the middle ages, Mr. Carker?"

"Very much indeed," said Mr. Carker.

"Such charming times!" cried Cleopatra. "So full of faith! So vigorous and forcible! So picturesque! So perfectly removed from commonplace! Oh dear! If they would only leave us a little more of the poetry of existence in these terrible days!"

Mrs. Skewton was looking sharp after Mr. Dombey all the time she said this, who was looking at Edith: who was listening, but who never lifted up her eyes.

"We are dreadfully real, Mr. Carker," said Mrs. Skewton; "are we not?"

Few people had less reason to complain of their reality than Cleopatra, who had as much that was false about her as could well go to the composition of anybody with a real individual existence. But Mr. Carker commiserated our reality nevertheless, and agreed that we were very hardly used in that regard.

"Pictures at the Castle quite divine!" said Cleopatra. "I hope you dote upon pictures?"

"I assure you, Mrs. Skewton," said Mr. Dombey, with solemn encouragement of his manager, "that Carker has a very good taste for pictures; quite a natural power of appreciating them. He is a very creditable artist himself. He will be delighted, I am sure, with Mrs. Granger's taste and skill."

"Damme, sir!" cried Major Bagstock, "my

opinion is, that you're the Admirable Carker, and can do anything."

"Oh!" smiled Carker with humility, "you are much too sanguine, Major Bagstock. I can do very little. But Mr. Dombey is so generous in his estimation of any trivial accomplishment a man like myself may find it almost necessary to acquire, and to which, in his very different sphere, he is far superior, that——" Mr. Carker shrugged his shoulders, deprecating further praise, and said no more.

All this time Edith never raised her eyes, unless to glance towards her mother when that lady's fervent spirit shone forth in words. But, as Carker ceased, she looked at Mr. Dombey for a moment. For a moment only; but with a transient gleam of scornful wonder on her face, not lost on one observer, who was smiling round the board.

Mr. Dombey caught the dark eyelash in its descent, and took the opportunity of arresting it.

"You have been to Warwick often, unfortunately?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Several times."

"The visit will be tedious to you, I am afraid."

"Oh no; not at all."

"Ah! You are like your cousin Feenix, my dearest Edith," said Mrs. Skewton. "He has been to Warwick Castle fifty times, if he has been there once; yet if he came to Leamington to-morrow—I wish he would, dear angel!—he would make his fifty-second visit next day."

"We are all enthusiastic, are we not, mamma?" said Edith with a cold smile.

"Too much so for our peace, perhaps, my dear," returned her mother; "but we won't complain. Our own emotions are our recompense. If, as your cousin Feenix says, the sword wears out the what's-its-name——"

"The scabbard, perhaps," said Edith.

"Exactly—a little too fast, it is because it is bright and glowing, you know, my dearest love."

Mrs. Skewton heaved a gentle sigh, supposed to cast a shadow on the surface of that dagger of lath, whereof her susceptible bosom was the sheath: and leaning her head on one side, in the Cleopatra manner, looked with pensive affection on her darling child.

Edith had turned her face towards Mr. Dombey when he first addressed her, and had remained in that attitude while speaking to her mother, and while her mother spoke to her, as though offering him her attention, if he had anything more to say. There was something in the manner of this simple courtesy: almost defiant, and giving it the character of being rendered on

compulsion, or as a matter of traffic to which she was a reluctant party: again not lost upon that same observer who was smiling round the board. It set him thinking of her as he had first seen her, when she had believed herself to be alone among the trees.

Mr. Dombey, having nothing else to say, proposed—the breakfast being now finished, and the major gorged, like any boa constrictor—that they should start. A barouche being in waiting, according to the orders of that gentleman, the two ladies, the major, and himself took their seats in it; the native and the wan page mounted the box, Mr. Towlinson being left behind; and Mr. Carker, on horseback, brought up the rear.

Mr. Carker cantered behind the carriage, at the distance of a hundred yards or so, and watched it, during all the ride, as if he were a cat indeed, and its four occupants mice. Whether he looked to one side of the road or to the other—over distant landscape, with its smooth undulations, windmills, corn, grass, bean fields, wild flowers, farmyards, hayricks, and the spire among the wood—or upward in the sunny air, where butterflies were sporting round his head, and birds were pouring out their songs—or downward, where the shadows of the branches interlaced, and made a trembling carpet on the road—or onward, where the overhanging trees formed aisles and arches, dim with the softened light that steeped through leaves—one corner of his eye was ever on the formal head of Mr. Dombey, addressed towards him, and the feather in the bonnet, drooping so neglectfully and scornfully between them: much as he had seen the haughty eyelids droop; not least so when the face met that now fronting it. Once, and once only, did his wary glance release these objects; and that was when a leap over a low hedge, and a gallop across a field, enabled him to anticipate the carriage coming by the road, and to be standing ready, at the journey's end, to hand the ladies out. Then, and but then, he met her glance for an instant in her first surprise; but when he touched her, in alighting, with his soft white hand, it overlooked him altogether as before.

Mrs. Skewton was bent on taking charge of Mr. Carker herself, and showing him the beauties of the Castle. She was determined to have his arm, and the major's too. It would do that incorrigible creature: who was the most barbarous infidel in point of poetry: good to be in such company. This chance arrangement left Mr. Dombey at liberty to escort Edith: which he did: stalking before them through the apartments with a gentlemanly solemnity.

"Those darling bygone times, Mr. Carker," said Cleopatra, "with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic vengeance, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming! How dreadfully we have degenerated!"

"Yes, we have fallen off deplorably," said Mr. Carker.

The peculiarity of their conversation was, that Mrs. Skewton, in spite of her ecstasies, and Mr. Carker, in spite of his urbanity, were both intent on watching Mr. Dombey and Edith. With all their conversational endowments, they spoke somewhat distractedly, and at random in consequence.

"We have no faith left, positively," said Mrs. Skewton, advancing her shrivelled ear; for Mr. Dombey was saying something to Edith. "We have no faith in the dear old barons, who were the most delightful creatures—or in the dear old priests, who were the most warlike of men—or even in the days of that inestimable Queen Bess, upon the wall there, which were so extremely golden! Dear creature! She was all heart! And that charming father of hers! I hope you dote on Harry the Eighth?"

"I admire him very much," said Carker.

"So bluff!" cried Mrs. Skewton, "wasn't he? So burly. So truly English. Such a picture, too, he makes, with his dear little peepy eyes, and his benevolent chin!"

"Ah, ma'am!" said Carker, stopping short; "but if you speak of pictures, there's a composition! What gallery in the world can produce the counterpart of that?"

As the smiling gentleman thus spake, he pointed through a doorway to where Mr. Dombey and Edith were standing alone in the centre of another room.

They were not interchanging a word or a look. Standing together, arm-in-arm, they had the appearance of being more divided than if seas had rolled between them. There was a difference even in the pride of the two, that removed them farther from each other than if one had been the proudest and the other the humblest specimen of humanity in all creation. He, self-important, unbending, formal, austere. She, lovely and graceful in an uncommon degree, but totally regardless of herself and him and everything around, and spurning her own attractions with her haughty brow and lip, as if they were a badge or livery she hated. So unmatched were they, and opposed: so forced and linked together by a chain which adverse hazard and mischance had forged: that fancy might have

imagined the pictures on the walls around them startled by the unnatural conjunction, and observant of it in their several expressions. Grim knights and warriors looked scowling on them. A churchman, with his hand upraised, denounced the mockery of such a couple coming to God's altar. Quiet waters in landscapes, with the sun reflected in their depths, asked, if better means of escape were not at hand, was there no drowning left? Ruins cried, "Look here, and see what We are, wedded to uncongenial Time!" Animals, opposed by nature, worried one another, as a moral to them. Loves and Cupids took to flight afraid, and Martyrdom had no such torment in its painted history of suffering.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Skewton was so charmed by the sight to which Mr. Carker invoked her attention, that she could not refrain from saying, half aloud, how sweet, how very full of soul it was! Edith, overhearing, looked round, and flushed indignant scarlet to her hair.

"My dearest Edith knows I was admiring her!" said Cleopatra, tapping her, almost timidly, on the back with her parasol. "Sweet pet!"

Again Mr. Carker saw the strife he had witnessed so unexpectedly among the trees. Again he saw the haughty languor and indifference come over it, and hide it like a cloud.

She did not raise her eyes to him; but, with a slight peremptory motion of them, seemed to bid her mother come near. Mrs. Skewton thought it expedient to understand the hint, and advancing quickly with her two cavaliers, kept near her daughter from that time.

Mr. Carker now, having nothing to distract his attention, began to discourse upon the pictures, and to select the best, and point them out to Mr. Dombey: speaking with his usual familiar recognition of Mr. Dombey's greatness, and rendering homage by adjusting his eye-glass for him, or finding out the right place in his catalogue, or holding his stick, or the like. These services did not so much originate with Mr. Carker, in truth, as with Mr. Dombey himself, who was apt to assert his chieftainship by saying, with subdued authority, and in an easy way—for him—"Here, Carker, have the goodness to assist me, will you?" which the smiling gentleman always did with pleasure.

They made the tour of the pictures, the walls, crow's nest, and so forth: and as they were still one little party, and the major was rather in the shade, being sleepy during the process of digestion, Mr. Carker became communicative and agreeable. At first he addressed himself for the most part to Mrs. Skewton; but as that sensi-

tive, lady was in such ecstasies with the works of art, after the first quarter of an hour, that she could do nothing but yawn (they were such perfect inspirations, she observed as a reason for that mark of rapture), he transferred his attentions to Mr. Dombey. Mr. Dombey said little beyond an occasional "Very true, Carker," or "Indeed, Carker?" but he tacitly encouraged Carker to proceed, and inwardly approved of his behaviour very much: deeming it as well that somebody should talk, and thinking that his remarks, which were, as one might say, a branch of the parent establishment, might amuse Mrs. Granger. Mr. Carker, who possessed an excellent discretion, never took the liberty of addressing that lady direct; but she seemed to listen, though she never looked at him; and once or twice, when he was emphatic in his peculiar humility, the twilight smile stole over her face, not as a light, but as a deep black shadow.

Warwick Castle being at length pretty well exhausted, and the major very much so: to say nothing of Mrs. Skewton, whose peculiar demonstrations of delight had become very frequent indeed: the carriage was again put in requisition, and they rode to several admired points of view in the neighbourhood. Mr. Dombey ceremoniously observed, of one of these, that a sketch, however slight, from the fair hand of Mrs. Granger would be a remembrance to him of that agreeable day: though he wanted no artificial remembrance, he was sure (here Mr. Dombey made another of his bows), which he must always highly value. Withers the lean, having Edith's sketch-book under his arm, was immediately called upon by Mrs. Skewton to produce the same: and the carriage stopped, that Edith might make the drawing, which Mr. Dombey was to put away among his treasures.

"But I am afraid I trouble you too much," said Mr. Dombey.

"By no means. Where would you wish it taken from?" she answered, turning to him with the same enforced attention as before.

Mr. Dombey, with another bow, which cracked the starch in his cravat, would beg to leave that to the artist.

"I would rather you chose for yourself," said Edith.

"Suppose, then," said Mr. Dombey, "we say from here. It appears a good spot for the purpose, or—Carker, what do *you* think?"

There happened to be in the foreground, at some little distance, a grove of trees, not unlike that in which Mr. Carker had made his chain of footsteps in the morning, and with a seat under

one tree, greatly resembling, in the general character of its situation, the point where his chain had broken.

"Might I venture to suggest to Mrs. Granger," said Carker, "that that is an interesting—almost a curious—point of view?"

She followed the direction of his riding whip with her eyes, and raised them quickly to his face. It was the second glance they had exchanged since their introduction; and would have been exactly like the first, but that its expression was plainer.

"Would you like that?" said Edith to Mr. Dombey.

"I shall be charmed," said Mr. Dombey to Edith.

Therefore the carriage was driven to the spot; where Mr. Dombey was to be charmed; and Edith, without moving from her seat, and opening her sketch-book with her usual proud indifference, began to sketch.

"My pencils are all pointless," she said, stopping and turning them over.

"Pray allow me," said Mr. Dombey. "Or Carker will do it better, as he understands these things. Carker, have the goodness to see to these pencils for Mrs. Granger."

Mr. Carker rode up close to the carriage door on Mrs. Granger's side, and letting the rein fall on his horse's neck, took the pencils from her hand with a smile and a bow, and sat in the saddle leisurely mending them. Having done so, he begged to be allowed to hold them, and to hand them to her as they were required; and thus Mr. Carker, with many commendations of Mrs. Granger's extraordinary skill—especially in trees—remained close at her side, looking over the drawing as she made it. Mr. Dombey, in the meantime, stood bolt upright in the carriage like a highly respectable ghost, looking on too; while Cleopatra and the major dallied as two ancient doves might do.

"Are you satisfied with that, or shall I finish it a little more?" said Edith, showing the sketch to Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Dombey begged that it might not be touched; it was perfection.

"It is most extraordinary," said Carker, bringing every one of his red gums to bear upon his praise. "I was not prepared for anything so beautiful, and so unusual altogether."

This might have applied to the sketcher no less than to the sketch: but Mr. Carker's manner was openness itself—not as to his mouth alone, but as to his whole spirit. So it continued to be while the drawing was laid aside for Mr. Dombey, and while the sketching mate-

rials were put up; then he handed in the pencils (which were received with a distant acknowledgment of his help, but without a look), and tightening his rein, fell back, and followed the carriage again.

Thinking, perhaps, as he rode, that even this trivial sketch had been made and delivered to its owner as if it had been bargained for and bought. Thinking, perhaps, that although she had assented with such perfect readiness to his request, her haughty face, bent over the drawing, or glancing at the distant objects represented in it, had been the face of a proud woman, engaged in a sordid and miserable transaction. Thinking, perhaps, of such things: but smiling certainly, and while he seemed to look about him freely, in enjoyment of the air and exercise, keeping always that sharp corner of his eye upon the carriage.

A stroll among the haunted ruins of Kenilworth, and more rides to more points of view: most of which, Mrs. Skewton reminded Mr. Dombey, Edith had already sketched, as he had seen in looking over her drawings: brought the day's expedition to a close. Mrs. Skewton and Edith were driven to their own lodgings; Mr. Carker was graciously invited by Cleopatra to return thither with Mr. Dombey and the major, in the evening, to hear some of Edith's music; and the three gentlemen repaired to their hotel to dinner.

The dinner was the counterpart of yesterday's, except that the major was twenty-four hours more triumphant and less mysterious. Edith was toasted again. Mr. Dombey was again agreeably embarrassed. And Mr. Carker was full of interest and praise.

There were no other visitors at Mrs. Skewton's. Edith's drawings were strewn about the room a little more abundantly than usual, perhaps; and Withers, the wan page, handed round a little stronger tea. The harp was there; the piano was there; and Edith sang and played. But even the music was paid by Edith to Mr. Dombey's order, as it were, in the same uncompromising way. As thus.

"Edith, my dearest love," said Mrs. Skewton, half an hour after tea, "Mr. Dombey is dying to hear you, I know."

"Mr. Dombey has life enough left to say so for himself, mamma, I have no doubt."

"I shall be immensely obliged," said Mr. Dombey.

"What do you wish?"

"Piano?" hesitated Mr. Dombey.

"Whatever you please. You have only to choose."

Accordingly, she began with the piano. It was the same with the harp; the same with her singing; the same with the selection of the pieces that she sang and played. Such frigid and constrained, yet prompt and pointed, acquiescence with the wishes he imposed upon her, and 'on no one else, was sufficiently remarkable to penetrate through all the mysteries of piquet, and impress itself on Mr. Carker's keen attention. Nor did he lose sight of the fact that Mr. Dombey was evidently proud of his power, and liked to show it.

Nevertheless, Mr. Carker played so well—some games with the major, and some with Cleopatra, whose vigilance of eye in respect of Mr. Dombey and Edith no lynx could have surpassed—that he even heightened his position in the lady mother's good graces; and when, on taking leave, he regretted that he would be obliged to return to London next morning, Cleopatra trusted: community of feeling not being met with every day: that it was far from being the last time they would meet.

"I hope so," said Mr. Carker, with an expressive look at the couple in the distance, as he drew towards the door, following the major. "I think so."

Mr. Dombey, who had taken a stately leave of Edith, bent, or made some approach to a bend, over Cleopatra's couch, and said, in a low voice:

"I have requested Mrs. Granger's permission to call on her to-morrow morning—for a purpose—and she has appointed twelve o'clock. May I hope to have the pleasure of finding you at home, madam, afterwards?"

Cleopatra was so much fluttered and moved by hearing this, of course, incomprehensible speech, that she could only shut her eyes, and shake her head, and give Mr. Dombey her hand; which Mr. Dombey, not exactly knowing what to do with, dropped.

"Dombey, come along!" cried the major, looking in at the door. "Damme, sir, old Joe has a great mind to propose an alteration in the name of the Royal Hotel, and that it should be called the Three Jolly Bachelors, in honour of ourselves and Carker." With this the major slapped Mr. Dombey on the back, and winking over his shoulder at the ladies, with a frightful tendency of blood to the head, carried him off.

Mrs. Skewton reposed on her sofa, and Edith sat apart, by her harp, in silence. The mother, trifling with her fan, looked stealthily at the daughter more than once, but the daughter, brooding gloomily, with downcast eyes, was not to be disturbed.

Thus they remained for a long hour, without a word, until Mrs. Skewton's maid appeared, according to custom, to prepare her gradually for night. At night she should have been a skeleton, with dart and hour-glass, rather than a woman, this attendant; for her touch was as the touch of Death. The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place, huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown.

The very voice was changed, as it addressed Edith, when they were alone again.

"Why don't you tell me," it said sharply, "that he is coming here to-morrow by appointment?"

"Because you know it," returned Edith, "Mother."

The mocking emphasis she laid on that one word!

"You know he has bought me," she resumed. "Or that he will to-morrow. He has considered of his bargain; he has shown it to his friend; he is even rather proud of it; he thinks that it will suit him, and may be had sufficiently cheap; and he will buy to-morrow. God, that I have lived for this, and that I feel it!"

Compress into one handsome face the conscious self-abasement and the burning indignation of a hundred women, strong in passion and in pride; and there it hid itself with two white shuddering arms.

"What do you mean?" returned the angry mother. "Haven't you from a child——"

"A child!" said Edith, looking at her. "When was I a child? What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman—artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men—before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman. Look upon her. She is in her pride to-night."

And, as she spoke, she struck her hand upon her beautiful bosom, as though she would have beaten down herself.

"Look at me," she said, "who have never known what it is to have an honest heart, and love. Look at me, taught to scheme and plot when children play, and married in my youth—an old age of design—to one for whom I had no feeling but indifference. Look at me, whom he left a widow, dying before his inheritance descended to him—a judgment on you, well

deserved!—and tell me what has been my life for ten years since."

"We have been making every effort to endeavour to secure to you a good establishment," rejoined her mother. "That has been your life, and now you have got it."

"There is no slave in a market, there is no horse in a fair, so shown and offered and examined and paraded, mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years," cried Edith, with a burning brow, and the same bitter emphasis on the one word. "Is it not so? Have I been made the by-word of all kinds of men? Have fools, have profligates, have boys, have dotards, dangled after me, and one by one rejected me, and fallen off, because you were too plain, with all your cunning—yes, and too true, with all those false pretences—until we have almost come to be notorious? The licence of look and touch," she said with flashing eyes, "have I submitted to it, in half the places of resort upon the map of England? Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself? Has *this* been my late childhood? I had none before. Do not tell me that I had, to-night, of all nights in my life!"

"You might have been well married," said her mother, "twenty times at least, Edith, if you had given encouragement enough."

"No! Who takes me, refuse that I am, and as I well deserve to be," she answered, raising her head, and trembling in her energy of shame and stormy pride, "shall take me, as this man does, with no art of mine put forth to lure him. He sees me at the auction, and he thinks it well to buy me. Let him! When he came to view me—perhaps to bid—he required to see the roll of my accomplishments. I gave it to him. When he would have me show one of them, to justify his purchase to his men, I require of him to say which he demands, and I exhibit it. I will do no more. He makes the purchase of his own will, and with his own sense of its worth, and the power of his money; and I hope it may never disappoint him. I have not vaunted and pressed the bargain; neither have you, so far as I have been able to prevent you."

"You talk strangely to-night, Edith, to your own mother."

"It seems so to me; stranger to me than to you," said Edith. "But my education was completed long ago. I am too old now, and have fallen too low, by degrees, to take a new course, and to stop yours, and to help myself. The germ of all that purifies a woman's breast, and makes it true and good, has never stirred in

mine, and I have nothing else to sustain me when I despise myself." There had been a touching sadness in her voice, but it was gone when she went on to say, "So, as we are genteel and poor, I am content that we should be made rich by these means; all I say is, I have kept the only purpose I have had the strength to form—I had almost said the power, with you at my side, mother—and have not tempted this man on."

"This man! You speak," said her mother, "as if you hated him."

"And you thought I loved him, did you not?" she answered, stopping on her way across the room, and looking round. "Shall I tell you," she continued, with her eyes fixed on her mother, "who already knows us thoroughly, and reads us right, and before whom I have even less of self-respect or confidence than before my own inward self: being so much degraded by his knowledge of me?"

"This is an attack, I suppose," returned her mother coldly, "on poor, unfortunate what's-his-name—Mr. Carker. Your want of self-respect and confidence, my dear, in reference to that person (who is very agreeable, it strikes me), is not likely to have much effect on your establishment. Why do you look at me so hard? Are you ill?"

Edith suddenly let fall her face as if it had been stung, and, while she pressed her hands upon it, a terrible tremble crept over her whole frame. It was quickly gone; and with her usual step she passed out of the room.

The maid, who should have been a skeleton, then reappeared, and giving one arm to her mistress, who appeared to have taken off her manner with her charms, and to have put on paralysis with her flannel gown, collected the ashes of Cleopatra, and carried them away, ready for to-morrow's revivification.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALTERATIONS.

So the day has come at length, Susan," said Florence to the excellent Nipper, "when we are going back to our quiet home!"

Susan drew in her breath with an amount of expression not easily described, and further relieving her feelings with a smart cough, answered, "Very quiet indeed, Miss Floy, no doubt. Excessive so."

"When I was a child," said Florence thoughtfully, and after musing for some moments, "did you ever see that gentleman who has taken the trouble to ride down here to speak to me, now, three times—three times I think, Susan?"

"Three times, miss," returned the Nipper. "Once when you was out a walking with them Sket—"

Florence gently looked at her, and Miss Nipper checked herself.

"With Sir Barnet and his lady, I mean to say, miss, and the young gentleman. And two evenings since then."

"When I was a child, and when company used to come to visit papa, did you ever see that gentleman at home, Susan?" asked Florence.

"Well, miss," returned her maid after considering, "I really couldn't say I ever did. When your poor dear ma died, Miss Floy, I was very new in the family, you see, and my element"—the Nipper bridled, as opining that her merits had been always designedly extinguished by Mr. Dombey—"was the floor below the attics."

"To be sure," said Florence, still thoughtfully; "you are not likely to have known who came to the house. I quite forgot."

"Not, miss, but what we talked about the family and visitors," said Susan, "and but what I heard much said, although the nurse before Mrs. Richards *did* make unpleasant remarks when I was in company, and hint at little Pitchers, but that could only be attributed, poor thing," observed Susan with composed forbearance, "to habits of intoxication, for which she was required to leave, and did."

Florence, who was seated at her chamber window, with her face resting on her hand, sat looking out, and hardly seemed to hear what Susan said, she was so lost in thought.

"At all events, miss," said Susan, "I remember very well that this same gentleman, Mr. Carker, was almost, if not quite, as great a gentleman with your papa then as he is now. It used to be said in the house then, miss, that he was at the head of all your pa's affairs in the City, and managed the whole, and that your pa minded him more than anybody, which, begging your pardon, Miss Floy, he might easy do, for he never minded anybody else. I knew that, Pitcher as I might have been."

Susan Nipper, with an injured remembrance of the nurse before Mrs. Richards, emphasized "Pitcher" strongly.

"And that Mr. Carker has not fallen off, miss," she pursued, "but has stood his ground,

and kept his credit with your pa, I know from what is always said among our people by that Perch, whenever he comes to the house, and though he's the weakest weed in the world, Miss Floy, and no one can have a moment's

patience with the man, he knows what goes on in the City tolerable well, and says that your pa does nothing without Mr. Carker, and leaves all to Mr. Carker, and acts according to Mr. Carker, and has Mr. Carker always at his elbow,



"A CHILD!" SAID EDITH, LOOKING AT HER. "WHEN WAS I A CHILD? WHAT CHILDHOOD DID YOU EVER LEAVE TO ME?"

and I do believe that he believes (that washiest of Perches) that after your pa, the Emperor of India is the child unborn to Mr. Carker."

Not a word of this was lost on Florence, who, with an awakened interest in Susan's speech, no longer gazed abstractedly on the prospect with-

out, but looked at her, and listened with attention.

"Yes, Susan," she said when that young lady had concluded. "He is in papa's confidence, and is his friend, I am sure."

Florence's mind ran high on this theme, and

had done for some days. Mr. Carker, in the two visits with which he had followed up his first one, had assumed a confidence between himself and her—a right on his part to be mysterious and stealthy, in telling her that the ship was still unheard of—a kind of mildly-restrained power and authority over her—that made her wonder, and caused her great uneasiness. She had no means of repelling it, or of freeing herself from the web he was gradually winding about her; for that would have required some art and knowledge of the world, opposed to such address as his; and Florence had none. True, he had said no more to her than that there was no news of the ship, and that he feared the worst; but how he came to know that she was interested in the ship, and why he had the right to signify his knowledge to her so insidiously and darkly, troubled Florence very much.

This conduct on the part of Mr. Carker, and her habit of often considering it with wonder and uneasiness, began to invest him with an uncomfortable fascination in Florence's thoughts. A more distinct remembrance of his features, voice, and manner: which she sometimes courted, as a means of reducing him to the level of a real personage, capable of exerting no greater charm over her than another: did not remove the vague impression. And yet he never frowned, or looked upon her with an air of dislike or animosity, but was always smiling and serene.

Again, Florence, in pursuit of her strong purpose with reference to her father, and her steady resolution to believe that she was herself unwittingly to blame for their so cold and distant relations, would recall to mind that this gentleman was his confidential friend, and would think, with an anxious heart, could her struggling tendency to dislike and fear him be a part of that misfortune in her which had turned her father's love adrift, and left her so alone? She dreaded that it might be; sometimes believed it was: then she resolved that she would try to conquer this wrong feeling; persuaded herself that she was honoured and encouraged by the notice of her father's friend; and hoped that patient observation of him and trust in him would lead her bleeding feet along that stony road which ended in her father's heart.

Thus, with no one to advise her—for she could advise with no one without seeming to complain against him—gentle Florence tossed on an uneasy sea of doubt and hope; and Mr. Carker, like a scaly monster of the deep, swam down below, and kept his shining eye upon her.

Florence had a new reason in all this for

wishing to be at home again. Her lonely life was better suited to her course of timid hope and doubt; and she feared, sometimes, that in her absence she might miss some hopeful chance of testifying her affection for her father. Heaven knows, she might have set her mind at rest, poor child! on this last point; but her slighted love was fluttering within her, and, even in her sleep, it flew away in dreams, and nestled, like a wandering bird come home, upon her father's neck.

Of Walter she thought often. Ah! how often, when the night was gloomy, and the wind was blowing round the house! But hope was strong in her breast. It is so difficult for the young and ardent, even with such experience as hers, to imagine youth and ardour quenched like a weak flame; and the bright day of life merging into night at noon, that hope was strong yet. Her tears fell frequently for Walter's sufferings, but rarely for his supposed death, and never long.

She had written to the old instrument-maker, but had received no answer to her note: which, indeed, required none. Thus matters stood with Florence on the morning when she was going home, gladly, to her old secluded life.

Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, accompanied (much against his will) by their valued charge, Master Barnet, were already gone back to Brighton, where that young gentleman and his fellow-pilgrims to Parnassus were then, no doubt, in the continual resumption of their studies. The holiday time was past and over; most of the juvenile guests at the villa had taken their departure; and Florence's long visit was come to an end.

There was one guest, however, albeit not resident within the house, who had been very constant in his attention to the family, and who still remained devoted to them. This was Mr. Toots, who, after renewing, some weeks ago, the acquaintance he had had the happiness of forming with Skettles junior, on the night when he burst the Blimberian bonds and soared into freedom with his ring on; called regularly every other day, and left a perfect pack of cards at the hall-door; so many, indeed, that the ceremony was quite a deal on the part of Mr. Toots, and a hand at whist on the part of the servant.

Mr. Toots likewise, with the bold and happy idea of preventing the family from forgetting him (but there is reason to suppose that this expedient originated in the teeming brain of the Chicken), had established a six-oared cutter, manned by aquatic friends of the Chicken's, and steered by that illustrious character in per-

son, who wore a bright red fireman's coat for the purpose, and concealed the perpetual black eye with which he was afflicted beneath a green shade. Previous to the institution of this equipage, Mr. Toots sounded the Chicken on a hypothetical case, as, supposing the Chicken to be enamoured of a young lady named Mary, and to have conceived the intention of starting a boat of his own, what would he call that boat? The Chicken replied, with divers strong asseverations, that he would either christen it Poll or The Chicken's Delight. Improving on this idea, Mr. Toots, after deep study and the exercise of much invention, resolved to call his boat The Toots's Joy, as a delicate compliment to Florence, of which no man knowing the parties, could possibly miss the appreciation.

Stretched on a crimson cushion in his gallant bark, with his shoes in the air, Mr. Toots, in the exercise of his project, had come up the river day after day, and week after week, and had flitted to and fro, near Sir Barnet's garden, and had caused his crew to cut across and across the river at sharp angles, for his better exhibition to any lookers-out from Sir Barnet's windows, and had had such evolutions performed by the Toots's Joy as had filled all the neighbouring part of the water-side with astonishment. But, whenever he saw any one in Sir Barnet's garden on the brink of the river, Mr. Toots always feigned to be passing there by a combination of coincidences of the most singular and unlikely description.

"How are you, Toots?" Sir Barnet would say, waving his hand from the lawn, while the artful Chicken steered close in shore.

"How de do, Sir Barnet?" Mr. Toots would answer. "What a surprising thing that I should see you here!"

Mr. Toots, in his sagacity, always said this, as if, instead of that being Sir Barnet's house, it were some deserted, edifice on the banks of the Nile or Ganges.

"I never was so surprised!" Mr. Toots would exclaim.—"Is Miss Dombey there?"

Whereupon Florence would appear, perhaps.

"Oh, Diogenes is quite well, Miss Dombey," Mr. Toots would cry. "I called to ask this morning."

"Thank you very much!" the pleasant voice of Florence would reply.

"Won't you come ashore, Toots?" Sir Barnet would say then. "Come! you're in no hurry." Come and see us."

"Oh, it's of no consequence, thank you!" Mr. Toots would blushinglly rejoin. "I thought Miss Dombey might like to know, that's all.

Good-bye!" And poor Mr. Toots, who was dying to accept the invitation, but hadn't the courage to do it, signed to the Chicken with an aching heart, and away went the Joy, cleaving the water like an arrow.

The Joy was lying in a state of extraordinary splendour, at the garden steps, on the morning of Florence's departure. When she went downstairs to take leave, after her talk with Susan, she found Mr. Toots awaiting her in the drawing-room.

"Oh, how de do, Miss Dombey?" said the stricken Toots, always dreadfully disconcerted when the desire of his heart was gained, and he was speaking to her. "Thank you, I'm very well indeed, I hope you're the same, so was Diogenes yesterday."

"You are very kind," said Florence.

"Thank you, it's of no consequence," retorted Mr. Toots. "I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind, in this fine weather, coming home by water, Miss Dombey. There's plenty of room in the boat for your maid."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Florence, hesitating. "I really am—but I would rather not."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," retorted Mr. Toots. "Good morning!"

"Won't you wait and see Lady Skettles?" asked Florence kindly.

"Oh no, thank you," returned Mr. Toots, "it's of no consequence at all."

So shy was Mr. Toots on such occasions, and so flurried! But Lady Skettles entering at the moment, Mr. Toots was suddenly seized with a passion for asking her how she did, and hoping she was very well; nor could Mr. Toots by any possibility leave off shaking hands with her until Sir Barnet appeared: to whom he immediately clung with the tenacity of desperation.

"We are losing to-day, Toots," said Sir Barnet, turning towards Florence "the light of our house, I assure you."

"Oh, it's of no consequence—I mean yes, to be sure," faltered the embarrassed Toots. "Good morning!"

Notwithstanding the emphatic nature of this farewell, Mr. Toots, instead of going away, stood leering about him vacantly. Florence, to relieve him, bade adieu, with many thanks, to Lady Skettles, and gave her arm to Sir Barnet.

"May I beg of you, my dear Miss Dombey," said her host as he conducted her to the carriage, "to present my best compliments to your dear papa?"

It was distressing to Florence to receive the commission; for she felt as if she were imposing

on Sir Barnet, by allowing him to believe that a kindness rendered to her was rendered to her father. As she could not explain, however, she bowed her head and thanked him; and again she thought that the dull home, free from such embarrassments, and such reminders of her sorrow, was her natural and best retreat.

Such of her late friends and companions as were yet remaining at the villa came running from within, and from the garden, to say good-bye. They were all attached to her, and very earnest in taking leave of her. Even the household were sorry for her going, and the servants came nodding and curtsying round the carriage door. As Florence looked round on the kind faces, and saw among them those of Sir Barnet and his lady, and of Mr. Toots, who was chuckling and staring at her from a distance, she was reminded of the night when Paul and she had come from Doctor Blimber's: and, when the carriage drove away, her face was wet with tears.

Sorrowful tears, but tears of consolation too; for all the softer memories connected with the dull old house to which she was returning made it dear to her as they rose up. How long it seemed since she had wandered through the silent rooms: since she had last crept, softly and afraid, into those her father occupied: since she had felt the solemn but yet soothing influence of the beloved dead in every action of her daily life! This new farewell reminded her, besides, of her parting with poor Walter: of his looks and words that night: and of the gracious blending she had noticed in him of tenderness for those he left behind, with courage and high spirit. His little history was associated with the old house, too, and gave it a new claim and hold upon her heart.

Even Susan Nipper softened towards the home of so many years as they were on their way towards it. Gloomy as it was, and rigid justice as she rendered to its gloom, she forgave it a great deal. "I shall be glad to see it again, I don't deny, miss," said the Nipper. "There ain't much in it to boast of, but I wouldn't have it burnt or pulled down neither!"

"You'll be glad to go through the old rooms, won't you, Susan?" said Florence, smiling.

"Well, miss," returned the Nipper, softening more and more towards the house as they approached it nearer, "I won't deny but what I shall, though I shall hate 'em again to-morrow, very likely."

Florence felt that, for her, there was greater peace within it than elsewhere. It was better and easier to keep her secret shut up there,

among the tall dark walls, than to carry it abroad into the light, and try to hide it from a crowd of happy eyes. It was better to pursue the study of her loving heart alone, and find no new discouragements in loving hearts about her. It was easier to hope, and pray and love on, all uncared for, yet with constancy and patience, in the tranquil sanctuary of such remembrances: although it mouldered, rusted, and decayed about her: than in a new scene, let its gaiety be what it would. She welcomed back her old enchanted dream of life, and longed for the old dark door to close upon her once again.

Full of such thoughts, they turned into the long and sombre street. Florence was not on that side of the carriage which was nearest to her home, and, as the distance lessened between them and it, she looked out of her window for the children over the way.

She was thus engaged, when an exclamation from Susan caused her to turn quickly round.

"Why gracious me!" cried Susan, breathless, "where's our house?"

"Our house!" said Florence.

Susan, drawing in her head from the window, thrust it out again, drew it in again as the carriage stopped, and stared at her mistress in amazement.

There was a labyrinth of scaffolding raised all round the house, from the basement to the roof: Loads of bricks and stones, and heaps of mortar, and piles of wood, blocked up half the width and length of the broad street at the side. Ladders were raised against the walls; labourers were climbing up and down; men were at work upon the steps of the scaffolding; painters and decorators were busy inside; great rolls of ornamental paper were being delivered from a cart at the door; an upholsterer's waggon also stopped the way; no furniture was to be seen through the gaping and broken windows in any of the rooms; nothing but workmen, and the implements of their several trades, swarming from the kitchens to the garrets. Inside and outside alike: bricklayers, painters, carpenters, masons: hammer, hod, brush, pickaxe, saw, and trowel: all at work together, in full chorus.

Florence descended from the coach, half doubting if it were, or could be, the right house, until she recognised Towlinson, with a sunburnt face, standing at the door to receive her.

"There is nothing the matter?" inquired Florence.

"Oh no, miss!"

"There are great alterations going on."

"Yes, miss, great alterations," said Towlinson.

Florence passed him as if she were in a dream,

and hurried up-stairs. The garish light was in the long-darkened drawing-room, and there were steps and platforms, and men in paper caps, in the high places. Her mother's picture was gone with the rest of the movables, and on the mark where it had been was scrawled in chalk, "This room in panel. Green and gold." The staircase was a labyrinth of posts and planks like the outside of the house, and a whole Olympus of plumbers and glaziers were reclining in various attitudes on the sky-light. Her own room was not yet touched within, but there were beams and boards raised against it without, balking the daylight. She went up swiftly to that other bedroom, where the little bed was; and a dark giant of a man, with a pipe in his mouth, and his head tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, was staring in at the window.

It was here that Susan Nipper, who had been, in quest of Florence, found her, and said, would she go down-stairs to her papa, who wished to speak to her?

"At home! and wishing to speak to me!" cried Florence, trembling.

Susan, who was infinitely more distraught than Florence herself, repeated her errand; and Florence, pale and agitated, hurried down again without a moment's hesitation. She thought upon the way down, would she dare to kiss him? The longing of her heart resolved her, and she thought she would.

Her father might have heard that heart beat when it came into his presence. One instant, and it would have beat against his breast—

But he was not alone. There were two ladies there; and Florence stopped. Striving so hard with her emotion, that if her brute friend Di had not burst in and overwhelmed her with his caresses as a welcome home—at which one of the ladies gave a little scream, and that diverted her attention from herself—she would have swooned upon the floor.

"Florence," said her father, putting out his hand: so stiffly that it held her off: "how do you do?"

Florence took the hand between her own, and putting it timidly to her lips, yielded to its withdrawal. It touched the door, in shutting it, with quite as much endearment as it had touched her.

"What dog is that?" said Mr. Dombey, displeased.

"It is a dog, papa, from Brighton."

"Well!" said Mr. Dombey; and a cloud passed over his face, for he understood her.

"He is very good-tempered," said Florence, addressing herself with her natural grace and

sweetness to the two lady strangers. "He is only glad to see me. Pray forgive him."

She saw in the glance they interchanged that the lady who had screamed, and who was seated, was old; and that the other lady, who stood near her papa, was very beautiful, and of an elegant figure.

"Mrs. Skewton," said her father, turning to the first, and holding out his hand, "this is my daughter Florence."

"Charming, I am sure," observed the lady, putting up her glass. "So natural! My darling Florence, you must kiss me, if you please."

Florence, having done so, turned towards the other lady, by whom her father stood waiting.

"Edith," said Mr. Dombey, "this is my daughter Florence. Florence, this lady will soon be your mamma."

Florence started, and looked up at the beautiful face in a conflict of emotions, among which the tears that name awakened struggled for a moment with surprise, interest, admiration, and an indefinable sort of fear. Then she cried out, "Oh, papa, may you be happy! may you be very, very happy all your life!" and then fell weeping on the lady's bosom.

There was a short silence. The beautiful lady, who at first had seemed to hesitate whether or no she should advance to Florence, held her to her breast, and pressed the hand with which she clasped her, close about her waist, as if to reassure her and comfort her. Not one word passed the lady's lips. She bent her head down over Florence, and she kissed her on the cheek, but she said no word.

"Shall we go on through the rooms," said Mr. Dombey, "and see how our workmen are doing? Pray allow me, my dear madam."

He said this in offering his arm to Mrs. Skewton, who had been looking at Florence through her glass, as though picturing to herself what she might be made, by the infusion—from her own copious storehouse, no doubt—of a little more Heart and Nature. Florence was still sobbing on the lady's breast, and holding to her, when Mr. Dombey was heard to say from the conservatory:

"Let us ask Edith. Dear me, where is she?"

"Edith, my dear!" cried Mrs. Skewton, "where are you? Looking for Mr. Dombey somewhere, I know. We are here, my love."

The beautiful lady released her hold of Florence, and pressing her lips once more upon her face, withdrew hurriedly, and joined them. Florence remained standing in the same place: happy, sorry, joyful, and in tears; she knew not how or how long, but all at once: when her new

mamma came back, and took her in her arms again.

"Florence," said the lady hurriedly, and looking into her face with great earnestness, "you will not begin by hating me?"

"By hating you, mamma!" cried Florence, winding her arm round her neck, and returning the look.

"Hush! Begin by thinking well of me," said the beautiful lady. "Begin by believing that I will try to make you happy, and that I am prepared to love you, Florence. Good-bye. We shall meet again soon. Good-bye! Don't stay here now."

Again she pressed her to her breast—she had spoken in a rapid manner, but firmly—and Florence saw her rejoin them in the other room.

And now Florence began to hope that she would learn from her new and beautiful mamma how to gain her father's love; and in her sleep that night, in her lost old home, her own mamma smiled radiantly upon the hope, and blessed it. Dreaming Florence!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE OPENING OF THE EYES OF MRS. CHICK.

MISS TOX, all unconscious of any such rare appearances, in connection with Mr. Dombey's house, as scaffoldings and ladders, and men with their heads tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs, glaring in at the windows like flying genii or strange birds, having breakfasted one morning, at about this eventful period of time, on her customary viands; to wit, one French roll rasped, one egg new laid (or warranted to be), and one little pot of tea, wherein was infused one little silver scoop-full of that herb on behalf of Miss Tox, and one little silver scoop-full on behalf of the teapot—a flight of fancy in which good housekeepers delight; went up-stairs to set forth the Bird Waltz on the harpsichord, to water and arrange the plants, to dust the knick-knacks, and, according to her daily custom, to make her little drawing-room the garland of Princess's Place.

Miss Tox endued herself with the pair of ancient gloves, like dead leaves, in which she was accustomed to perform these avocations—hidden from human sight at other times in a table drawer—and went methodically to work; beginning with the Bird Waltz; passing, by a natural association of ideas, to her bird—a very

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high-shouldered canary, stricken in years, and much rumped, but a piercing singer, as Princess's Place well knew; taking, next in order, the little china ornaments, paper fly-cages, and so forth; and coming round, in good time, to the plants, which generally required to be snipped here and there with a pair of scissors, for some botanical reason that was very powerful with Miss Tox.

Miss Tox was slow in coming to the plants this morning. The weather was warm, the wind southerly; and there was a sigh of the summer-time in Princess's Place, that turned Miss Tox's thoughts upon the country. The potboy attached to the Princess's Arms had come out with a can, and trickled water, in a flowing pattern, all over Princess's Place, and it gave the weedy ground a fresh scent—quite a growing scent, Miss Tox said. There was a tiny blink of sun peeping in from the great street round the corner, and the smoky sparrows hopped over it, and back again, brightening as they passed: or bathed in it like a stream, and became glorified sparrows, unconnected with chimneys. Legends in praise of Ginger Beer, with pictorial representations of thirsty customers submerged in the effervescence, or stunned by the flying corks, were conspicuous in the window of the Princess's Arms. They were making late hay somewhere out of town; and though the fragrance had a long way to come, and many counter-fragrances to contend with among the dwellings of the poor (may God reward the worthy gentlemen who stickle for the plague as part and parcel of the wisdom of our ancestors, and who do their little best to keep those dwellings miserable!), yet it was wafted faintly into Princess's Place, whispering of Nature and her wholesome air, as such things will, even unto prisoners and captives, and those who are desolate and oppressed.

Miss Tox sat down upon the window-seat, and thought of her good papa deceased—Mr. Tox, of the Customs Department of the public service; and of her childhood, passed at a seaport, among a considerable quantity of cold tar, and some rusticity. She fell into a softened remembrance of meadows in old time, gleaming with buttercups, like so many inverted firmaments of golden stars; and how she had made chains of dandelion stalks for youthful vowers of eternal constancy, dressed chiefly in nankeen; and how soon those fetters had withered and broken.

Sitting on the window-seat, and looking out upon the sparrows and the blink of sun, Miss Tox thought likewise of her good mamma de-

ceased—sister to the owner of the powdered head and pigtail—of her virtues, and her rheumatism. And when a man with bulgy legs, and a rough voice, and a heavy basket on his head that crushed his hat into a mere black muffin, came crying flowers down Princess's Place, making his timid little roots of daisies shudder in the vibration of every yell he gave, as though he had been an ogre hawking little children, summer recollections were so strong upon Miss Tox that she shook her head, and murmured, she would be comparatively old before she knew it—which seemed likely.

In her pensive mood, Miss Tox's thoughts went wandering on Mr. Dombey's track, probably because the major had returned home to his lodgings opposite, and had just bowed to her from his window. What other reason could Miss Tox have for connecting Mr. Dombey with her summer days and dandelion fetters? Was he more cheerful? thought Miss Tox. Was he reconciled to the decrees of fate? Would he ever marry again; and if yes, whom? What sort of person now?

A flush—it was warm weather—overspread Miss Tox's face as, while entertaining these meditations, she turned her head, and was surprised by the reflection of her thoughtful image in the chimney-glass. Another flush succeeded when she saw a little carriage drive into Princess's Place, and make straight for her own door. Miss Tox arose, took up her scissors hastily, and so coming, at last, to the plants, was very busy with them when Mrs. Chick entered the room.

"How is my sweetest friend?" exclaimed Miss Tox with open arms.

A little stateliness was mingled with Miss Tox's sweetest friend's demeanour, but she kissed Miss Tox, and said, "Lucretia, thank you, I am pretty well. I hope you are the same. Hem!"

Mrs. Chick was labouring under a peculiar little monosyllabic cough, a sort of primer, or easy introduction to the art of coughing.

"You call very early, and how kind that is, my dear!" pursued Miss Tox. "Now have you breakfasted?"

"Thank you, Lucretia," said Mrs. Chick, "I have. I took an early breakfast"—the good lady seemed curious on the subject of Princess's Place, and looked all round it as she spoke—"with my brother, who has come home."

"He is better, I trust, my love?" faltered Miss Tox.

"He is greatly better, thank you. Hem!"

"My dear Louisa must be careful of that cough," remarked Miss Tox.

"It's nothing," returned Mrs. Chick. "It's merely change of weather. We must expect change."

"Of weather?" asked Miss Tox in her simplicity.

"Of everything," returned Mrs. Chick. "Of course we must. It's a world of change. Any one would surprise me very much, Lucretia, and would greatly alter my opinion of their understanding, if they attempted to contradict or evade what is so perfectly evident. Change!" exclaimed Mrs. Chick with severe philosophy. "Why, my gracious me, what is there that does not change? Even the silkworm, who I am sure might be supposed not to trouble itself about such subjects, changes into all sorts of unexpected things continually."

"My Louisa," said the mild Miss Tox, "is ever happy in her illustrations."

"You are so kind, Lucretia," returned Mrs. Chick, a little softened, "as to say so, and to think so, I believe. I hope neither of us may ever have any cause to lessen our opinion of the other, Lucretia."

"I am sure of it," returned Miss Tox.

Mrs. Chick coughed as before, and drew lines on the carpet with the ivory end of her parasol. Miss Tox, who had experience of her fair friend, and knew that under the pressure of any slight fatigue or vexation she was prone to a discursive kind of irritability, availed herself of the pause to change the subject.

"Pardon me, my dear Louisa," said Miss Tox, "but have I caught sight of the manly form of Mr. Chick in the carriage?"

"He is there," said Mrs. Chick, "but pray leave him there. He has his newspaper, and would be quite contented for the next two hours. Go on with your flowers, Lucretia, and allow me to sit here and rest."

"My Louisa knows," observed Miss Tox, "that, between friends like ourselves, any approach to ceremony would be out of the question. Therefore—" Therefore Miss Tox finished the sentence, not in words, but action; and putting on her gloves again, which she had taken off, and arming herself once more with her scissors, began to snip and clip among the leaves with microscopic industry.

"Florence has returned home also," said Mrs. Chick, after sitting silent for some time, with her head on one side, and her parasol sketching on the floor; "and really Florence is a great deal too old now to continue to lead that solitary life to which she has been accustomed. Of course she is. There can be no doubt about it. I should have very little

respect, indeed, for anybody who could advocate a different opinion: Whatever my wishes might be, *I could not* respect them. We cannot command our feelings to such an extent as that."

Miss Tox assented, without being particular as to the intelligibility of the proposition.

"If she's a strange girl," said Mrs. Chick, "and if my brother Paul cannot feel perfectly comfortable in her society, after all the sad things that have happened, and all the terrible disappointments that have been undergone, then, what is the reply? That he must make an effort. That he is bound to make an effort. We have always been a family remarkable for effort. Paul is at the head of the family; almost the only representative of it left—for what am I?—I am of no consequence——"

"My dearest love!" remonstrated Miss Tox.

Mrs. Chick dried her eyes, which were, for the moment, overflowing; and proceeded:

"—And consequently he is more than ever bound to make an effort. And though his having done so comes upon me with a sort of shock—for mine is a very weak and foolish nature; which is anything but a blessing, I am sure; I often wish my heart was a marble slab, or a paving-stone——"

"My sweet Louisa!" remonstrated Miss Tox again.

"—Still, it is a triumph to me to know that he is so true to himself, and to his name of *Dombe*; although, of course, I always knew he would be. I only hope," said Mrs. Chick after a pause, "that she may be worthy of the name too."

Miss Tox filled a little green watering-pot from a jug, and happening to look up when she had done so, was so surprised by the amount of expression Mrs. Chick had conveyed into her face, and was bestowing upon her, that she put the little watering-pot on the table for the present, and sat down near it.

"My dear Louisa," said Miss Tox, "will it be the least satisfaction to you if I venture to observe, in reference to that remark, that I, as a humble individual, think your sweet-niece in every way most promising?"

"What do you mean, Lucretia?" returned Mrs. Chick with increased statelyness of manner. "To what remark of mine, my dear, do you refer?"

"Her being worthy of her name, my love," replied Miss Tox.

"If," said Mrs. Chick with solemn patience, "I have not expressed myself with clearness, Lucretia, the fault, of course, is mine. There

is, perhaps, no reason why I should express myself at all, except the intimacy that has subsisted between us, and which I very much hope, Lucretia—confidently hope—nothing will occur to disturb. Because, why should I do anything else? There is no reason; it would be absurd. But I wish to express myself clearly, Lucretia; and therefore, to go back to that remark, I must beg to say that it was not intended to relate to Florence in any way."

"Indeed!" returned Miss Tox.

"No," said Mrs. Chick shortly and decisively.

"Pardon me, my dear," rejoined her meek friend; "but I cannot have understood it. I fear I am dull."

Mrs. Chick looked round the room and over the way; at the plants, at the bird, at the watering-pot, at almost everything within view, except Miss Tox; and finally, dropping her glance upon Miss Tox, for a moment, on its way to the ground, said, looking meanwhile with elevated eyebrows at the carpet:

"When I speak, Lucretia, of her being worthy of the name, I speak of my brother Paul's second wife. I believe I have already said, in effect, if not in the very words I now use, that it is his intention to marry a second wife."

Miss Tox left her seat in a hurry, and returned to her plants; clipping among the stems and leaves with as little favour as a barber working at so many pauper heads of hair.

"Whether she will be fully sensible of the distinction conferred upon her," said Mrs. Chick in a lofty tone, "is quite another question. I hope she may be. We are bound to think well of one another in this world, and I hope she may be. I have not been advised with, myself. If I had been advised with, I have no doubt my advice would have been cavalierly received, and therefore it is infinitely better as it is. I much prefer it as it is."

Miss Tox, with head bent down, still clipped among the plants. Mrs. Chick, with energetic shakings of her own head from time to time, continued to hold forth, as if in defiance of somebody.

"If my brother Paul had consulted with me, which he sometimes does—or rather, sometimes used to do; for he will naturally do that no more now, and this is a circumstance which I regard as a relief from responsibility," said Mrs. Chick hysterically, "for I thank Heaven I am not jealous:" here Mrs. Chick again shed tears: "if my brother Paul had come to me, and had said, 'Louisa, what kind of qualities would you advise me to look out for in a wife?' I should cer-

tainly have answered, 'Paul, you must have family, you must have beauty, you must have dignity, you must have connection.' Those are the words I should have used. You might have led me to the block immediately afterwards," said Mrs. Chick, as if that consequence

were highly probable, "but I should have used them. I should have said, 'Paul! You to marry a second time without family! You to marry without beauty! You to marry without dignity! You to marry without connection! There is nobody in the world, not mad, who



LUCKETIA TOX'S REVERIE.

could dream of daring to entertain such a preposterous idea!"

Miss Tox stopped clipping; and, with her head among the plants, listened attentively. Perhaps Miss Tox thought there was hope in this exordium, and in the warmth of Mrs. Chick.

"I should have adopted this course of argument," pursued the discreet lady, "because I trust I am not a fool. I make no claim to be considered a person of superior intellect—though I believe some people have been extraordinary enough to consider me so; one so little humoured

as I am would very soon be disabused of any such notion ; but I trust I am not a downright fool. And to tell me," said Mrs. Chick with ineffable disdain, "that my brother, Paul Dombey, could ever contemplate the possibility of uniting himself to anybody—I don't care who"—she was more sharp and emphatic in that short clause than in any other part of her discourse—"not possessing these requisites, would be to insult what understanding I *have* got, as much as if I was to be told that I was born and bred an elephant. Which I *may* be told next," said Mrs. Chick with resignation. "It wouldn't surprise me at all. I expect it."

In the moment's silence that ensued, Miss Tox's scissors gave a feeble clip or two ; but Miss Tox's face was still invisible, and Miss Tox's morning gown was agitated. Mrs. Chick looked sideways at her, through the intervening plants, and went on to say, in a tone of bland conviction, and as one dwelling on a point of fact that hardly required to be stated :

"Therefore, of course my brother Paul has done what was to be expected of him, and what anybody might have foreseen he would do, if he entered the marriage state again. I confess it takes me rather by surprise, however gratifying ; because, when Paul went out of town, I had no idea at all that he would form any attachment out of town, and he certainly had no attachment when he left here. However, it seems to be extremely desirable in every point of view. I have no doubt the mother is a most genteel and elegant creature, and I have no right whatever to dispute the policy of her living with them : which is Paul's affair, not mine ; and as to Paul's choice, herself, I have only seen her picture yet, but that is beautiful indeed. Her name is beautiful too," said Mrs. Chick, shaking her head with energy, and arranging herself in her chair ; "Edith is at once uncommon, as it strikes me, and distinguished. Consequently, Lucretia, I have no doubt you will be happy to hear that the marriage is to take place immediately—of course you will ;" great emphasis again : "and that you are delighted with this change in the condition of my brother, who has shown you a great deal of pleasant attention at various times."

Miss Tox made no verbal answer, but took up the little watering-pot with a trembling hand, and looked vacantly round, as if considering what article of furniture would be improved by the contents. The room-door opening at this crisis of Miss Tox's feelings, she started, laughed aloud, and fell into the arms of the person entering ; happily insensible alike of Mrs. Chick's indignant countenance, and of the major at his

window over the way, who had his double-barrelled eye-glass in full action, and whose face and figure were dilated with Mephistophilean joy.

Not so the expatriated native, amazed supporter of Miss Tox's swooning form, who, coming straight up-stairs with a palpitant inquiry touching Miss Tox's health (in exact pursuance of the major's malicious instructions), had accidentally arrived in the very nick of time to catch the delicate burden in his arms, and to receive the contents of the little watering-pot in his shoe ; both of which circumstances, coupled with his consciousness of being closely watched by the wrathful major, who had threatened the usual penalty in regard of every bone in his skin in case of any failure, combined to render him a moving spectacle of mental and bodily distress.

For some moments this afflicted foreigner remained clasping Miss Tox to his heart, with an energy of action in remarkable opposition to his disconcerted face, while that poor lady trickled slowly down upon him the very last sprinklings of the little watering-pot, as if he were a delicate exotic (which, indeed, he was), and might be almost expected to blow while the gentle rain descended. Mrs. Chick, at length recovering sufficient presence of mind to interpose, commanded him to drop Miss Tox upon the sofa and withdraw ; and the exile promptly obeying, she applied herself to promote Miss Tox's recovery.

But none of that gentle concern which usually characterises the daughters of Eve in their tending of each other ; none of that freemasonry in fainting, by which they are generally bound together in a mysterious bond of sisterhood ; was visible in Mrs. Chick's demeanour. Rather, like the executioner who restores the victim to sensation previous to proceeding with the torture (or was wont to do so in the good old times for which all true men wear perpetual mourning), did Mrs. Chick administer the smelling-bottle, the slapping on the hands, the dashing of cold water on the face, and the other proved remedies. And when, at length, Miss Tox opened her eyes, and gradually became restored to animation and consciousness, Mrs. Chick drew off as from a criminal, and, reversing the precedent of the murdered King of Denmark, regarded her more in anger than in sorrow.

"Lucretia !" said Mrs. Chick. "I will not attempt to disguise what I feel. My eyes are opened all at once. I wouldn't have believed this, if a saint had told it to me."

"I am foolish to give way to faintness," Miss Tox faltered. "I shall be better presently."

"You will be better presently, Lucretia!" repeated Mrs. Chick with exceeding scorn. "Do you suppose I am blind? Do you imagine I am in my second childhood? No, Lucretia! I am obliged to you!"

Miss Tox directed an imploring, helpless kind of look towards her friend, and put her handkerchief before her face.

"If any one had told me this yesterday," said Mrs. Chick with majesty, "or even half an hour ago, I should have been tempted, I almost believe, to strike them to the earth. Lucretia Tox, my eyes are opened to you all at once. The scales"—here Mrs. Chick cast down an imaginary pair, such as are commonly used in grocers' shops—"have fallen from my sight. The blindness of my confidence is past, Lucretia. It has been abused and played upon, and evasion is quite out of the question now, I assure you."

"Oh! to what do you allude so cruelly, my love?" asked Miss Tox through her tears.

"Lucretia," said Mrs. Chick, "ask your own heart. I must entreat you not to address me by any such familiar term as you have just used, if you please. I have some self-respect left, though you may think otherwise."

"Oh, Louisa!" cried Miss Tox. "How can you speak to me like that?"

"How can I speak to you like that?" retorted Mrs. Chick, who, in default of having any particular argument to sustain herself upon, relied principally on such repetitions for her most withering effects. "Like that! You may well say like that, indeed!"

Miss Tox sobbed pitifully.

"The idea!" said Mrs. Chick, "of your having basked at my brother's fireside like a serpent, and wound yourself, through me, almost into his confidence, Lucretia, that you might, in secret, entertain designs upon him, and dare to aspire to contemplate the possibility of his uniting himself to *you*! Why, it is an idea," said Mrs. Chick with sarcastic dignity, "the absurdity of which almost relieves its treachery."

"Pray, Louisa," urged Miss Tox, "do not say such dreadful things."

"Dreadful things!" repeated Mrs. Chick. "Dreadful things! Is it not a fact, Lucretia, that you have just now been unable to command your feelings even before me, whose eyes you had so completely closed?"

"I have made no complaint," sobbed Miss Tox. "I have said nothing. If I have been a little overpowered by your news, Louisa, and have ever had any lingering thought that Mr. Dombey was inclined to be particular towards me, surely *you* will not condemn me."

"She is going to say," said Mrs. Chick, addressing herself to the whole of the furniture, in a comprehensive glance of resignation and appeal, "she is going to say—I know it—that I have encouraged her!"

"I don't wish to exchange reproaches, dear Louisa," sobbed Miss Tox. "Nor do I wish to complain. But, in my own defence—"

"Yes," cried Mrs. Chick, looking round the room with a prophetic smile, "that's what she's going to say. I knew it. You had better say it. Say it openly! Be open, Lucretia Tox," said Mrs. Chick with desperate sternness, "what ever you are."

"—In my own defence," faltered Miss Tox, "and only in my own defence against your unkind words, my dear Louisa, I would merely ask you if you haven't often favoured such a fancy, and even said it might happen, for anything we could tell?"

"There is a point," said Mrs. Chick, rising, not as if she were going to stop at the floor, but as if she were about to soar up high into her native skies, "beyond which endurance becomes ridiculous, if not culpable. I can bear much; but not too much. What spell was on me when I came into this house this day, I don't know; but I had a presentiment—a dark presentiment," said Mrs. Chick with a shiver, "that something was going to happen. Well may I have had that foreboding, Lucretia, when my confidence of many years is destroyed in an instant, when my eyes are opened all at once, and when I find you revealed in your true colours. Lucretia, I have been mistaken in you. It is better for us both that this subject should end here. I wish you well, and I shall ever wish you well. But, as an individual who desires to be true to herself in her own poor position, whatever that position may be, or may not be—and as the sister of my brother—and as the sister-in-law of my brother's wife—and as a connection by marriage of my brother's wife's mother—may I be permitted to add, as a Dombey?—I can wish you nothing else but good morning."

These words, delivered with cutting suavity, tempered and chastened by a lofty air of moral rectitude, carried the speaker to the door. There she inclined her head in a ghostly and statue-like manner, and so withdrew to her carriage, to seek comfort and consolation in the arms of Mr. Chick, her lord.

Figuratively speaking, that is to say, for the arms of Mr. Chick were full of his newspaper. Neither did that gentleman address his eyes towards his wife otherwise than by stealth. Neither did he offer any consolation whatever. In short,

he sat reading, and humming fag-ends of tunes, and sometimes glancing furtively at her without delivering himself of a word, good, bad, or indifferent.

In the meantime Mrs. Chick sat swelling and bridding, and tossing her head, as if she were still repeating that solemn formula of farewell to Lucretia Tox. At length she said aloud, "Oh the extent to which her eyes had been opened that day!"

"To which your eyes have been opened, my dear!" repeated Mr. Chick.

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Mrs. Chick. "If you can bear to see me in this state, and not ask me what the matter is, you had better hold your tongue for ever."

"What *is* the matter, my dear?" asked Mr. Chick.

"To think," said Mrs. Chick in a state of soliloquy, "that she should ever have conceived the base idea of connecting herself with our family by a marriage with Paul! To think that when she was playing at horses with that dear child who is now in his grave—I never liked it at the time—she should have been hiding such a double-faced design! I wonder she was never afraid that something would happen to her. She is fortunate if nothing does."

"I really thought, my dear," said Mr. Chick slowly, after rubbing the bridge of his nose for some time with his newspaper, "that you had gone on the same tack yourself, all along, until this morning; and had thought it would be a convenient thing enough, if it could have been brought about."

Mrs. Chick instantly burst into tears, and told Mr. Chick that, if he wished to trample upon her with his boots, he had better do it.

"But with Lucretia Tox I have done," said Mrs. Chick, after abandoning herself to her feelings for some minutes, to Mr. Chick's great terror. "I can bear to resign Paul's confidence in favour of one who, I hope and trust, may be deserving of it, and with whom he has a perfect right to replace poor Fanny if he chooses; I can bear to be informed, in Paul's cool manner, of such a change in his plans, and never to be consulted until all is settled and determined; but deceit I can *not* bear, and with Lucretia Tox I have done. It is better as it is," said Mrs. Chick piously; "much better. It would have been a long time before I could have accommodated myself comfortably with her, after this; and I really don't know, as Paul is going to be very grand; and these are people of condition, that she would have been quite presentable, and might not have compromised myself. There's

a providence in everything; everything works for the best; I have been tried to-day, but, upon the whole, I don't regret it."

In which Christian spirit Mrs. Chick dried her eyes, and smoothed her lap, and sat as became a person calm under a great wrong. Mr. Chick, feeling his unworthiness, no doubt, took an early opportunity of being set down at a street corner and walking away whistling, with his shoulders very much raised, and his hands in his pockets.

While poor excommunicated Miss Tox, who, if she were a fawner and toad-eater, was at least an honest and a constant one, and had ever borne a faithful friendship towards her impecacher, and had been truly absorbed and swallowed up in devotion to the magnificence of Mr. Dombey—while poor excommunicated Miss Tox watered her plants with her tears, and felt that it was winter in Princess's Place.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE INTERVAL BEFORE THE MARRIAGE.

ALTHOUGH the enchanted house was no more, and the working world had broken into it, and was hammering and crashing and tramping up and down stairs all day long, keeping Diogenes in an incessant paroxysm of barking from sunrise to sunset—evidently convinced that his enemy had got the better of him at last, and was then sacking the premises in triumphant defiance—there was, at first, no other great change in the method of Florence's life. At night, when the workpeople went away, the house was dreary and deserted again; and Florence, listening to their voices echoing through the hall and staircase as they departed, pictured to herself the cheerful homes to which they were returning, and the children who were waiting for them, and was glad to think that they were merry and well pleased to go.

She welcomed back the evening silence as an old friend, but it came now with an altered face, and looked more kindly on her. Fresh hope was in it. The beautiful lady who had soothed and caressed her, in the very room in which her heart had been so wrong, was a spirit of promise to her. Soft shadows of the bright life dawning, when her father's affection should be gradually won, and all, or much, should be restored of what she had lost on the dark day when a

mother's love had faded with a mother's last breath on her cheek, moved about her in the twilight, and were welcome company. Peeping at the rosy children her neighbours, it was a new and precious sensation to think that they might soon speak together and know each other: when she would not fear, as of old, to show herself before them, lest they should be grieved to see her in her black dress sitting there alone!

In her thoughts of her new mother, and in the love and trust overflowing her pure heart towards her, Florence loved her own dead mother more and more. She had no fear of setting up a rival in her breast. The new flower sprang from the deep-planted and long-cherished root, she knew. Every gentle word that had fallen from the lips of the beautiful lady sounded to Florence like an echo of the voice long hushed and silent. How could she love that memory less for living tenderness, when it was her memory of all parental tenderness and love?

Florence was, one day, sitting reading in her room, and thinking of the lady and her promised visit soon—for her book turned on a kindred subject—when, raising her eyes, she saw her standing in the doorway.

"Mamma!" cried Florence, joyfully meeting her. "Come again!"

"Not mamma yet," returned the lady with a serious smile, as she encircled Florence's neck with her arm.

"But very soon to be," cried Florence.

"Very soon now, Florence: very soon."

Edith bent her head a little so as to press the blooming cheek of Florence against her own, and for some few moments remained thus silent. There was something so very tender in her manner, that Florence was even more sensible of it than on the first occasion of their meeting.

She led Florence to a chair beside her, and sat down; Florence looking in her face, quite wondering at its beauty, and willingly leaving her hand in hers.

"Have you been alone, Florence, since I was here last?"

"Oh yes!" smiled Florence hastily.

She hesitated and cast down her eyes; for her new mamma was very earnest in her look, and the look was intently and thoughtfully fixed upon her face.

"I—I—am used to be alone," said Florence. "I don't mind it at all. Di and I pass whole days together sometimes." Florence might have said whole weeks and months.

"Is Di your maid, love?"

"My dog, mamma," said Florence, laughing. "Susan is my maid."

"And these are your rooms," said Edith, looking round. "I was not shown these rooms the other day. We must have them improved, Florence. They shall be made the prettiest in the house."

"If I might change them, mamma," returned Florence, "there is one up-stairs I should like much better."

"Is this not high enough, dear girl?" asked Edith, smiling.

"The other was my brother's room," said Florence, "and I am very fond of it. I would have spoken to papa about it when I came home, and found the workmen here, and everything changing; but——"

Florence dropped her eyes, lest the same look should make her falter again.

"—But I was afraid it might distress him; and as you said you would be here again soon, mamma, and are the mistress of everything, I determined to take courage and ask you."

Edith sat looking at her, with her brilliant eyes intent upon her face, until, Florence raising her own, she, in her turn, withdrew her gaze, and turned it on the ground. It was then that Florence thought how different this lady's beauty was from what she had supposed. She had thought it of a proud and lofty kind; yet her manner was so subdued and gentle, that if she had been of Florence's own age and character, it scarcely could have invited confidence more.

Except when a constrained and singular reserve crept over her; and then she seemed (but Florence hardly understood this, though she could not choose but notice it, and think about it) as if she were humbled before Florence, and ill at ease. When she had said that she was not her mamma yet, and when Florence had called her the mistress of everything there, this change in her was quick and startling; and now, while the eyes of Florence rested on her face, she sat as though she would have shrunk and hidden from her, rather than as one about to love and cherish her, in right of such a near connection.

She gave Florence her ready promise about her new room, and said she would give directions about it herself. She then asked some questions concerning poor Paul; and, when they had sat in conversation for some time, told Florence she had come to take her to her own home.

"We have come to London now, my mother and I," said Edith, "and you shall stay with us until I am married. I wish that we should know and trust each other, Florence."

"You are very kind to me," said Florence, "dear mamma. How much I thank you!"

"Let me say now, for it may be the best opportunity," continued Edith, looking round to see that they were quite alone, and speaking in a lower voice, "that when I am married, and have gone away for some weeks, I shall be easier at heart if you will come home here. No matter who invites you to stay elsewhere, come home here. It is better to be alone than—— What I would say is," she added, checking herself, "that I know well you are best at home, dear Florence."

"I will come home on the very day, mamma."

"Do so. I rely on that promise. Now prepare to come with me, dear girl. You will find me down-stairs when you are ready."

Slowly and thoughtfully did Edith wander alone through the mansion of which she was so soon to be the lady: and little heed took she of all the elegance and splendour it began to display. The same indomitable haughtiness of soul, the same proud scorn expressed in eye and lip, the same fierce beauty, only tamed by a sense of its own little worth, and of the little worth of everything around it, went through the grand saloons and halls, that had got loose among the shady trees, and ragged and rent themselves. The mimic roses on the walls and floors were set round with sharp thorns, that tore her breast; in every scrap of gold, so dazzling to the eye, she saw some hateful atom of her purchase-money; the broad high mirrors showed her, at full length, a woman with a noble quality yet dwelling in her nature, who was too false to her better self, and too debased and lost, to save herself. She believed that all this was so plain, more or less, to all eyes, that she had no resource or power of self-assertion but in pride: and with this pride, which tortured her own heart night and day, she fought her fate out, braved it, and defied it.

Was this the woman whom Florence—an innocent girl, strong only in her earnestness and simple truth—could so impress and quell, that by her side she was another creature, with her tempest of passion hushed, and her very pride itself subdued? Was this the woman who now sat beside her in a carriage, with her arms entwined, and who, while she courted and entreated her to love and trust her, drew her fair head to nestle on her breast, and would have laid down life to shield it from wrong or harm?

Oh, Edith! it were well to die, indeed, at such a time! Better and happier far, perhaps, to die so, Edith, than to live on to the end!

The Honourable Mrs. Skewton, who was thinking of anything rather than of such sentiments—for, like many genteel persons who have

existed at various times, she set her face against death altogether, and objected to the mention of any such low and levelling upstart—had borrowed a house in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, from a stately relative (one of the Feenix brood), who was out of town, and who did not object to lending it, in the handsomest manner, for nuptial purposes, as the loan implied his final release and acquittance from all further loans and gifts to Mrs. Skewton and her daughter. It being necessary, for the credit of the family, to make a handsome appearance at such a time, Mrs. Skewton, with the assistance of an accommodating tradesman resident in the parish of Mary-le-bone, who lent out all sorts of articles to the nobility and gentry, from a service of plate to an army of footmen, clapped into this house a silver-headed butler (who was charged extra on that account, as having the appearance of an ancient family retainer), two very tall young men in livery, and a select staff of kitchen servants; so that a legend arose, down-stairs, that Withers the page, released at once from his numerous household duties, and from the propulsion of the wheeled chair (inconsistent with the metropolis), had been several times observed to rub his eyes and pinch his limbs, as if he misdoubted his having overslept himself at the Leamington milkman's, and being still in a celestial dream. A variety of requisites in plate and china being also conveyed to the same establishment from the same convenient source, with several miscellaneous articles, including a neat chariot and a pair of bays, Mrs. Skewton cushioned herself on the principal sofa, in the Cleopatra attitude, and held her court in fair state.

"And how," said Mrs. Skewton, on the entrance of her daughter and her charge, "is my charming Florence? You must come and kiss me, Florence, if you please, my love."

Florence was timidly stooping to pick out a place in the white part of Mrs. Skewton's face, when that lady presented her ear, and relieved her of her difficulty.

"Edith, my dear," said Mrs. Skewton, "positively, I—— Stand a little more in the light, my sweetest Florence, for a moment."

Florence blushing complied.

"You don't remember, dearest Edith," said her mother, "what you were when you were at about the same age as our exceedingly precious Florence, or a few years younger?"

"I have long forgotten, mother."

"For positively, my dear," said Mrs. Skewton, "I do think that I see a decided resemblance to what you were then, in our extremely

fascinating young friend. And it shows," said Mrs. Skewton in a lower voice, which conveyed her opinion that Florence was in a very unfinished state, "what cultivation will do."

"It does, indeed," was Edith's stern reply.

Her mother eyed her sharply for a moment, and feeling herself on unsafe ground, said, as a diversion:

"My charming Florence, you must come and kiss me once more, if you please, my love."

Florence complied, of course, and again imprinted her lips on Mrs. Skewton's ear.

"And you have heard, no doubt, my darling pet," said Mrs. Skewton, detaining her hand, "that your papa, whom we all perfectly adore and dote upon, is to be married to my dearest Edith this day week?"

"I knew it would be very soon," returned Florence, "but not exactly when."

"My darling Edith," urged her mother gaily, "is it possible you have not told Florence?"

"Why should I tell Florence?" she returned, so suddenly and harshly, that Florence could scarcely believe it was the same voice.

Mrs. Skewton then told Florence, as another and safer diversion, that her father was coming to dinner, and that he would no doubt be charmingly surprised to see her; as he had spoken last night of dressing in the City, and had known nothing of Edith's design, the execution of which, according to Mrs. Skewton's expectation, would throw him into a perfect ecstasy. Florence was troubled to hear this; and her distress became so keen, as the dinner hour approached, that if she had known how to frame an entreaty to be suffered to return home, without involving her father in her explanation, she would have hurried back on foot, bareheaded, breathless, and alone, rather than incur the risk of meeting his displeasure.

As the time drew nearer, she could hardly breathe. She dared not approach a window, lest he should see her from the street. She dared not go up-stairs to hide her emotion, lest, in passing out at the door, she should meet him unexpectedly; besides which dread, she felt as though she never could come back again if she were summoned to his presence. In this conflict of her fears, she was sitting by Cleopatra's couch, endeavouring to understand and to reply to the bald discourse of that lady, when she heard his foot upon the stair.

"I hear him now!" cried Florence, starting. "He is coming!"

Cleopatra, who in her juvenility was always playfully disposed, and who in her self-engrossment did not trouble herself about the nature

of this agitation, pushed Florence behind her couch, and dropped a shawl over her, preparatory to giving Mr. Dombey a rapture of surprise. It was so quickly done that in a moment Florence heard his awful step in the room.

He saluted his intended mother-in-law and his intended bride. The strange sound of his voice thrilled through the whole frame of his child.

"My dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "come here and tell me how your pretty Florence is."

"Florence is very well," said Mr. Dombey, advancing towards the couch.

"At home?"

"At home," said Mr. Dombey.

"My dear Dombey," returned Cleopatra with bewitching vivacity; "now are you sure you are not deceiving me? I don't know what my dearest Edith will say to me when I make such a declaration, but, upon my honour, I am afraid you are the falsest of men, my dear Dombey."

Though he had been; and had been detected on the spot in the most enormous falsehood that was ever said or done; he could hardly have been more disconcerted than he was when Mrs. Skewton plucked the shawl away, and Florence, pale and trembling, rose before him like a ghost. He had not yet recovered his presence of mind when Florence had run up to him, clasped her hands round his neck, kissed his face, and hurried out of the room. He looked round as if to refer the matter to somebody else, but Edith had gone after Florence instantly.

"Now, confess, my dear Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, giving him her hand, "that you never were more surprised and pleased in your life."

"I never was more surprised," said Mr. Dombey.

"Nor pleased, my dearest Dombey?" returned Mrs. Skewton, holding up her fan.

"I—yes, I am exceedingly glad to meet Florence here," said Mr. Dombey. He appeared to consider gravely about it for a moment, and then said, more decidedly, "Yes, I really am very glad indeed to meet Florence here."

"You wonder how she comes here," said Mrs. Skewton, "don't you?"

"Edith, perhaps——" suggested Mr. Dombey.

"Ah! wicked guesser!" replied Cleopatra, shaking her head. "Ah! cunning, cunning man! One shouldn't tell these things; your sex, my dear Dombey, are so vain, and so apt to abuse our weaknesses; but, you know, my open soul—— Very well: immediately."

This was addressed to one of the very tall young men who announced dinner.

"But Edith, my dear Dombey," she continued in a whisper, "when she cannot have you near her—and, as I tell her, she cannot expect that always—will at least have near her something or somebody belonging to you. Well, how extremely natural that is! And, in this spirit, nothing would keep her from riding off to-day to fetch our darling Florence. Well, how excessively charming that is!"

As she waited for an answer, Mr. Dombey answered, "Eminently so."

"Bless you, my dear Dombey, for that proof of heart!" cried Cleopatra, squeezing his hand. "But I am growing too serious! Take me down-stairs, like an angel, and let us see what these people intend to give us for dinner. Bless you, dear Dombey!"

Cleopatra skipping off her couch with tolerable briskness after the last benediction, Mr. Dombey took her arm in his, and led her ceremoniously down-stairs; one of the very tall young men on hire, whose organ of veneration was imperfectly developed, thrusting his tongue into his cheek, for the entertainment of the other very tall young man on hire, as the couple turned into the dining-room.

Florence and Edith were already there, and sitting side by side. Florence would have risen when her father entered, to resign her chair to him; but Edith openly put her hand upon her arm, and Mr. Dombey took an opposite place at the round table.

The conversation was almost entirely sustained by Mrs. Skewton. Florence hardly dared to raise her eyes, lest they should reveal the traces of tears; far less dared to speak; and Edith never uttered one word, unless in answer to a question. Verily, Cleopatra worked hard for the establishment that was so nearly clutched; and verily it should have been a rich one to reward her!

"And so your preparations are nearly finished at last, my dear Dombey?" said Cleopatra, when the dessert was put upon the table, and the silver-headed butler had withdrawn. "Even the lawyer's preparations!"

"Yes, madam," replied Mr. Dombey; "the deed of settlement, the professional gentlemen inform me, is now ready, and, as I was mentioning to you, Edith has only to do us the favour to suggest her own time for its execution."

Edith sat like a handsome statue; as cold, as silent, and as still.

"My dearest love," said Cleopatra, "do you hear what Mr. Dombey says? Ah, my dear Dombey!" aside to that gentleman, "how her absence, as the time approaches, reminds me of

the days when that most agreeable of creatures, her papa, was in your situation!"

"I have nothing to suggest. It shall be when you please," said Edith, scarcely looking over the table at Mr. Dombey.

"To-morrow?" suggested Mr. Dombey.

"If you please."

"Or would next day," said Mr. Dombey, "suit your engagements better?"

"I have no engagements. I am always at your disposal. Let it be when you like."

"No engagements, my dear Edith!" remonstrated her mother, "when you are in a most terrible state of flurry all day long, and have a thousand and one appointments with all sorts of tradespeople!"

"They are of your making," returned Edith, turning on her, with a slight contraction of her brow. "You and Mr. Dombey can arrange between you."

"Very true indeed, my love, and most considerate of you!" said Cleopatra. "My darling Florence, you must really come and kiss me once more, if you please, my dear!"

Singular coincidence that these gushes of interest in Florence hurried Cleopatra away from almost every dialogue in which Edith had a share, however trifling! Florence had certainly never undergone so much embracing, and perhaps had never been, unconsciously, so useful in her life.

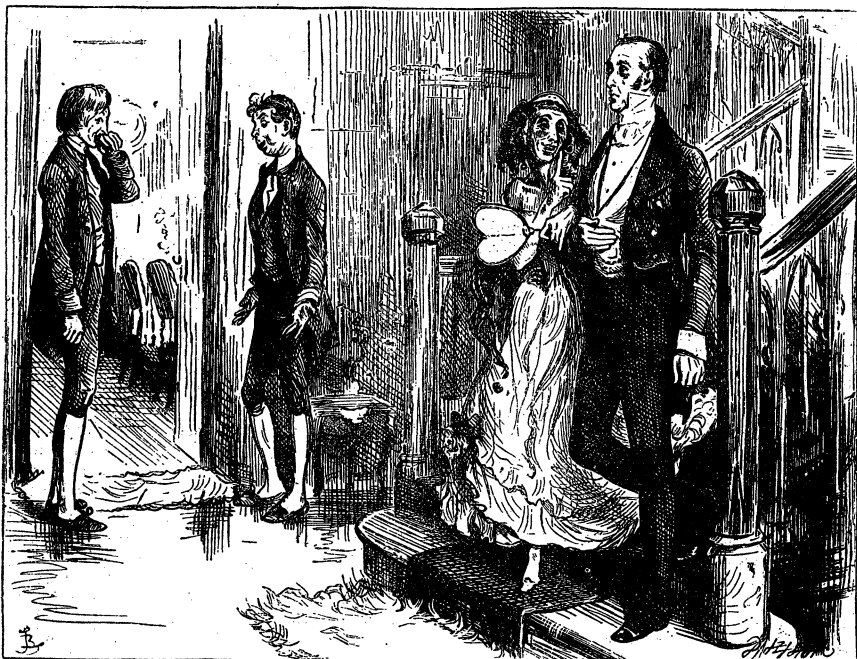
Mr. Dombey was far from quarrelling, in his own breast, with the manner of his beautiful betrothed. He had that good reason for sympathy with haughtiness and coldness which is found in a fellow-feeling. It flattered him to think how these deferred to him in Edith's case, and seemed to have no will apart from his. It flattered him to picture to himself this proud and stately woman doing the honours of his house, and chilling his guests after his own manner. The dignity of Dombey and Son would be heightened and maintained, indeed, in such hands.

So thought Mr. Dombey when he was left alone at the dining-table, and mused upon his past and future fortunes: finding no uncongeniality in an air of scant and gloomy state that pervaded the room, in colour a dark brown, with black hatchments of pictures blotching the walls, and twenty-four black chairs, with almost as many nails in them as so many coffins, waiting like mutes upon the threshold of the Turkey carpet; and two exhausted negroes holding up two withered branches of candelabra on the sideboard, and a musty smell prevailing, as if the ashes of ten thousand dinners were entombed

in the sarcophagus below it. The owner of the house lived much abroad; the air of England seldom agreed long with a member of the Feenix family; and the room had gradually put itself into deeper and still deeper mourning for him, until it was become so funereal as to want nothing but a body in it to be quite complete.

No bad representation of the body, for the ncnce, in his unbending form, if not in his

attitude, Mr. Dombey looked down into the cold depths of the Dead Sea of mahogany on which the fruit-dishes and decanters lay at anchor; as if the subjects of his thoughts were rising towards the surface one by one, and plunging down again. Edith was there in all her majesty of brow and figure; and close to her came Florence, with her timid head turned to him, as it had been, for an instant, when she



"ONE OF THE VERY TALL YOUNG MEN ON HIRE, WHOSE ORGAN OF GENERATION WAS IMPERFECTLY DEVELOPED, THRUSTING HIS TONGUE INTO HIS CHEEK, FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT OF THE OTHER VERY TALL YOUNG MAN ON HIRE, AS THE COUPLE TURNED INTO THE DINING-ROOM."

left the room; and Edith's eyes upon her, and Edith's hand put out protectingly. A little figure in a low arm-chair came springing next into the light, and looked upon him wonderingly, with its bright eyes and its old-young face, gleaming as in the flickering of an evening fire. Again came Florence close upon it, and absorbed his whole attention. Whether as a foredoomed difficulty and disappointment to him, whether as a rival who had crossed him in his way, and might again; whether as his child, of whom, in

his successful wooing, he could stoop to think, as claiming, at such a time, to be no more estranged; or whether as a hint to him that the mere appearance of caring for his own blood should be maintained in his new relations; he best knew. Indifferently well, perhaps, at best; for marriage company and marriage altars, and ambitious scenes—still blotted here and there with Florence—always Florence—turned up so fast, and so confusedly, that he rose, and went up-stairs, to escape them.

It was quite late at night before candles were brought; and at present they made Mrs. Skewton's head ache, she complained; and in the meantime Florence and Mrs. Skewton talked together (Cleopatra being very anxious to keep her close to herself), or Florence touched the piano softly for Mrs. Skewton's delight; to make no mention of a few occasions, in the course of the evening, when that affectionate lady was impelled to solicit another kiss, and which always happened after Edith had said anything. They were not many, however, for Edith sat apart by an open window during the whole time (in spite of her mother's fears that she would take cold), and remained there until Mr. Dombey took leave. He was serenely gracious to Florence when he did so; and Florence went to bed in a room within Edith's, so happy and hopeful, that she thought of her late self as if it were some other poor deserted girl who was to be pitied for her sorrow; and, in her pity, sobbed herself to sleep.

The week fled fast: There were drives to milliners, dressmakers, jewellers, lawyers, florists, pastrycooks; and Florence was always of the party. Florence was to go to the wedding. Florence was to cast off her mourning, and to wear a brilliant dress on the occasion. The milliner's intentions on the subject of this dress—the milliner was a Frenchwoman, and greatly resembled Mrs. Skewton—were so chaste and elegant, that Mrs. Skewton bespoke one like it for herself. The milliner said it would become her to admiration, and that all the world would take her for the young lady's sister.

The week fled faster. Edith looked at nothing and cared for nothing. Her rich dresses came home, and were tried on, and were loudly commended by Mrs. Skewton and the milliners, and were put away without a word from her. Mrs. Skewton made their plans for every day, and executed them. Sometimes Edith sat in the carriage when they went to make purchases; sometimes, when it was absolutely necessary, she went into the shops. But Mrs. Skewton conducted the whole business, whatever it happened to be; and Edith looked on as uninterested and with as much apparent indifference as if she had no concern in it. Florence might perhaps have thought she was haughty and listless, but that she was never so to her. So Florence quenched her wonder in her gratitude whenever it broke out, and soon subdued it.

The week fled faster. It had nearly winged its flight away. The last night of the week, the night before the marriage, was come. In the dark room—for Mrs. Skewton's head was no

better yet, though she expected to recover permanently to-morrow—were that lady, Edith, and Mr. Dombey. Edith was at her open window, looking out into the street; Mr. Dombey and Cleopatra were talking softly on the sofa. It was growing late; and Florence, being fatigued, had gone to bed.

"My dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "you will leave me Florence to-morrow, when you deprive me of my sweetest Edith?"

Mr. Dombey said he would with pleasure.

"To have her about me here while you are both at Paris, and to think that, at her age, I am assisting in the formation of her mind, my dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "will be a perfect balm to me in the extremely shattered state to which I shall be reduced."

Edith turned her head suddenly. Her listless manner was exchanged, in a moment, to one of burning interest, and, unseen in the darkness, she attended closely to their conversation.

Mr. Dombey would be delighted to leave Florence in such admirable guardianship.

"My dear Dombey," returned Cleopatra, "a thousand thanks for your good opinion. I feared you were going, with malice aforethought, as the dreadful lawyers say—those horrid proses!—to condemn me to utter solitude."

"Why do me so great an injustice, my dear madam?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Because my charming Florence tells me so positively she must go home to-morrow," returned Cleopatra, "that I began to be afraid, my dearest Dombey, you were quite a Bashaw."

"I assure you, madam!" said Mr. Dombey, "I have laid no commands on Florence; and if I had, there are no commands like your wish."

"My dear Dombey," replied Cleopatra, "what a courtier you are! Though I'll not say so, either; for courtiers have no heart, and yours pervades your charming life and character. And are you really going so early, my dear Dombey?"

Oh, indeed! it was late, and Mr. Dombey feared he must.

"Is this a fact, or is it all a dream?" lisped Cleopatra. "Can I believe, my dearest Dombey, that you are coming back to-morrow morning to deprive me of my sweet companion; my own Edith?"

Mr. Dombey, who was accustomed to take things literally, reminded Mrs. Skewton that they were to meet first at the church.

"The pang," said Mrs. Skewton, "of consigning a child, even to you, my dear Dombey, is one of the most excruciating imaginable; and combined with a naturally delicate constitution, and the extreme stupidity of the pastrycook who has undertaken the breakfast, is almost too much

for my poor strength. But I shall rally, my dear Dombey, in the morning; do not fear for me, or be uneasy on my account. Heaven bless you! My dearest Edith!" she cried archly. "Somebody is going, pet."

Edith, who had turned her head again towards the window, and whose interest in their conversation had ceased, rose up in her place, but made no advance towards him, and said nothing. Mr. Dombey, with a lofty gallantry adapted to his dignity and the occasion, betook his creaking boots towards her, put her hand to his lips, and said, "To-morrow morning I shall have the happiness of claiming this hand as Mrs. Dombey's," and bowed himself solemnly out.

Mrs. Skewton rang for candles as soon as the house-door had closed upon him. With the candles appeared her maid, with the juvenile dress that was to delude the world to-morrow. The dress had savage retribution in it, as such dresses ever have, and made her infinitely older and more hideous than her greasy flannel gown. But Mrs. Skewton tried it on with mincing satisfaction; smirked at her cadaverous self in the glass, as she thought of its killing effect upon the major; and suffering her maid to take it off again, and to prepare her for repose, tumbled into ruins like a house of painted cards.

All this time Edith remained at the dark window, looking out into the street. When she and her mother were at last left alone, she moved from it for the first time that evening, and came opposite to her. The yawning, shaking, peevish figure of the mother, with her eyes raised to confront the proud, erect form of the daughter, whose glance of fire was bent downward upon her, had a conscious air upon it, that no levity or temper could conceal.

"I am tired to death," said she. "You can't be trusted for a moment. You are worse than a child. Child! No child would be half so obstinate and undutiful."

"Listen to me, mother," returned Edith, passing these words by with a scorn that would not descend to trifle with them. "You must remain alone here until I return."

"Must remain alone here, Edith, until you return?" repeated her mother.

"Or in that name upon which I shall call to-morrow to witness what I do, so falsely and so shamefully, I swear I will refuse the hand of this man in the church. If I do not, may I fall dead upon the pavement!"

The mother answered with a look of quick alarm, in no degree diminished by the look she met.

"It is enough!" said Edith steadily, "that we

are what we are. I will have no youth and truth dragged down to my level. I will have no guileless nature undermined, corrupted, and perverted, to amuse the leisure of a world of mothers. You know my meaning. Florence must go home."

"You are an idiot, Edith," cried her angry mother. "Do you expect there can ever be peace for you in that house till she is married, and away?"

"Ask me, or ask yourself, if I ever expect peace in that house," said her daughter, "and you know the answer."

"And am I to be told to-night, after all my pains and labour, and when you are going, through me, to be rendered independent," her mother almost shrieked in her passion, while her palsied head shook like a leaf, "that there is corruption and contagion in me, and that I am not fit company for a girl? What are you, pray? What are you?"

"I have put the question to myself," said Edith, ashy pale, and pointing to the window, "more than once when I have been sitting there, and something in the faded likeness of my sex has wandered past outside; and God knows I have met with my reply. Oh, mother, mother, if you had but left me to my natural heart when I too was a girl—a younger girl than Florence—how different I might have been!"

Sensible that any show of anger was useless here, her mother restrained herself, and fell a whimpering, and bewailed that she had lived too long, and that her only child had cast her off, and that duty towards parents was forgotten in these evil days, and that she had heard unnatural taunts, and cared for life no longer.

"If one is to go on living through continual scenes like this," she whined, "I am sure it would be much better for me to think of some means of putting an end to my existence. Oh! The idea of your being my daughter, Edith, and addressing me in such a strain!"

"Between us, mother," returned Edith mournfully, "the time for mutual reproaches is past."

"Then why do you revive it?" whimpered her mother. "You know that you are lacerating me in the cruellest manner. You know how sensitive I am to unkindness. At such a moment, too, when I have so much to think of, and am naturally anxious to appear to the best advantage! I wonder at you, Edith. To make your mother a fright upon your wedding-day!"

Edith bent the same fixed look upon her as she sobbed and rubbed her eyes; and said in the same low, steady voice, which had neither risen nor fallen since she first addressed her, "I have said that Florence must go home."

"Let her go!" cried the afflicted and affrighted parent hastily. "I am sure I am willing she should go. What is the girl to me?"

"She is so much to me, that rather than communicate, or suffer to be communicated, to her one grain of the evil that is in my breast, mother, I would renounce you, as I would (if you gave me cause) renounce him in the church to-morrow," replied Edith. "Leave her alone. She shall not, while I can interpose, be tampered with and tainted by the lessons I have learned. This is no hard condition on this bitter night."

"If you had proposed it in a filial manner, Edith," whined her mother, "perhaps not; very likely not. But such extremely cutting words——"

"They are past and at an end between us now," said Edith. "Take your own way, mother; share as you please in what you have gained; spend, enjoy, make much of it; and be as happy as you will. The object of our lives is won. Henceforth let us wear it silently. My lips are closed upon the past from this hour. I forgive you your part in to-morrow's wickedness. May God forgive my own!"

Without a tremor in her voice or frame, and passing onward with a foot that set itself upon the neck of every soft emotion, she bade her mother good night, and repaired to her own room.

But not to rest: for there was no rest in the tumult of her agitation when alone. To and fro, and to and fro, and to and fro again, five hundred times, among the splendid preparations for her adornment on the morrow; with her dark hair shaken down, her dark eyes flashing with a raging light, her broad white bosom red with the cruel grasp of the relentless hand with which she spurned it from her, pacing up and down with an averted head, as if she would avoid the sight of her own fair person, and divorce herself from its companionship. Thus, in the dead time of the night before her bridal, Edith Granger wrestled with her unquiet spirit, tearless, friendless, silent, proud, and uncomplaining.

At length it happened that she touched the open door which led into the room where Florence lay.

She started, stopped, and looked in.

A light was burning there, and showed her Florence in her bloom of innocence and beauty, fast asleep. Edith held her breath, and felt herself drawn on towards her.

Drawn nearer, nearer, nearer yet; at last, drawn so near, that stooping down, she pressed her lips to the gentle hand that lay outside the

bed, and put it softly to her neck. Its touch was like the prophet's rod of old upon the rock. Her tears sprung forth beneath it, as she sunk upon her knees, and laid her aching head and streaming hair upon the pillow by its side.

Thus Edith Granger passed the night before her bridal. Thus the sun found her on her bridal morning.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE WEDDING.

DAWN, with its passionless blank face, steals shivering to the church beneath which lies the dust of little Paul and his mother, and looks in at the windows. It is cold and dark. Night crouches yet upon the pavement, and broods, sombre and heavy, in nooks and corners of the building. The steeple clock, perched up above the houses, emerging from beneath another of the countless ripples in the tide of time that regularly roll and break on the eternal shore, is greyly visible like a stone beacon, recording how the sea flows on; but within doors, dawn, at first, can only peep at night, and see that it is there.

Hovering feebly round the church, and looking in, dawn moans and weeps for its short reign, and its tears trickle on the window glass, and the trees against the church wall bow their heads, and wring their many hands in sympathy. Night, growing pale before it, gradually fades out of the church, but lingers in the vaults below, and sits upon the coffins. And now comes bright day, burnishing the steeple clock; and reddening the spire, and drying up the tears of dawn, and stifling its complaining; and the scared dawn, following the night, and chasing it from its last refuge, shrinks into the vaults itself, and hides, with a frightened face, among the dead, until night returns, refreshed, to drive it out.

And now, the mice, who have been busier with the Prayer-books than their proper owners, and with the hassocks, more worn by their little teeth than by human knees, hide their bright eyes in their holes, and gather close together in affright at the resounding clashing of the church-door. For the beadle, that man of power, comes early this morning with the sexton; and Mrs. Miff, the wheezy little pew-opener—a mighty dry old lady, sparsely dressed, with not an inch of fulness anywhere about her—is also here, and

has been waiting at the church-gate half an hour, as her place is, for the beadle.

A vinegary face has Mrs. Miff, and a mortified bonnet, and eke a thirsty soul for sixpences and shillings. Beckoning to stray people to come into pews has given Mrs. Miff an air of mystery; and there is reservation in the eye of Mrs. Miff, as always knowing of a softer seat, but having her suspicions of the fee. There is no such fact as Mr. Miff, nor has there been these twenty years, and Mrs. Miff would rather not allude to him. He held some bad opinions, it would seem, about free-seats; and though Mrs. Miff hopes he may be gone upward, she couldn't positively undertake to say so.

Busy is Mrs. Miff this morning at the church-door, beating and dusting the altar cloth, the carpet, and the cushions; and much has Mrs. Miff to say about the wedding they are going to have. Mrs. Miff is told that the new furniture and alterations in the house cost full five thousand pound, if they cost a penny; and Mrs. Miff has heard, upon the best authority, that the lady hasn't got a sixpence wherewithal to bless herself. Mrs. Miff remembers, likewise, as if it had happened yesterday, the first wife's funeral, and then the christening, and then the other funeral; and Mrs. Miff says, By-the-bye, she'll soap-and-water that ere tablet presently, against the company arrive. Mr. Sownds, the beadle, who is sitting in the sun upon the church steps all this time (and seldom does anything else, except, in cold weather, sitting by the fire), approves of Mrs. Miff's discourse, and asks if Mrs. Miff has heard it said that the lady is uncommon handsome? The information Mrs. Miff has received being of this nature, Mr. Sownds the beadle, who, though orthodox and corpulent, is still an admirer of female beauty, observes, with unction, Yes, he hears she is a spanker—an expression that seems somewhat forcible to Mrs. Miff, or would from any lips but those of Mr. Sownds the beadle.

In Mr. Dombey's house, at this same time, there is great stir and bustle, more especially among the women: not one of whom has had a wink of sleep since four o'clock, and all of whom were full dressed before six. Mr. Towlinson is an object of greater consideration than usual to the housemaid, and the cook says at breakfast-time that one wedding makes many, which the housemaid can't believe, and don't think true at all. Mr. Towlinson reserves his sentiments on this question; being rendered something gloomy by the engagement of a foreigner with whiskers (Mr. Towlinson is whiskerless himself), who has been hired to accom-

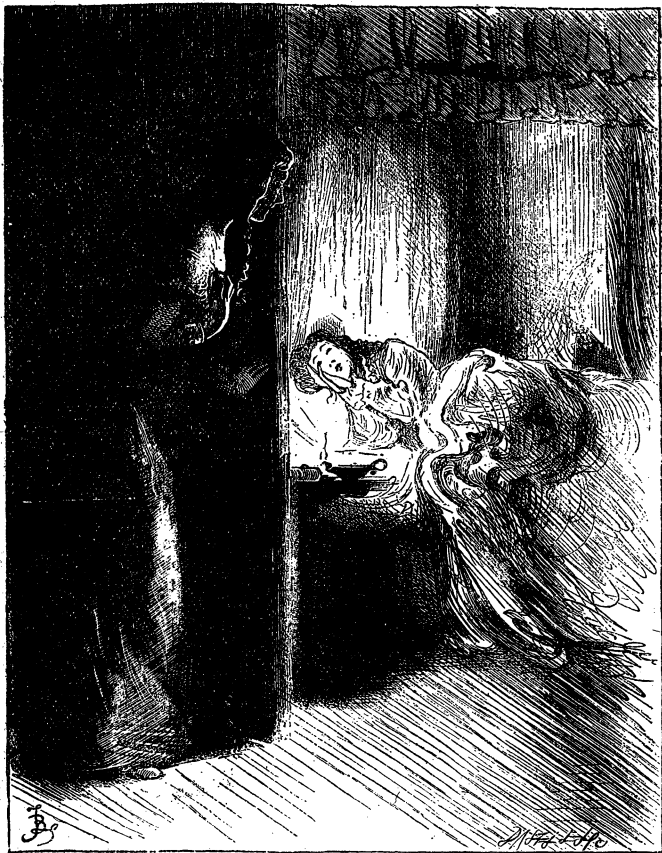
pany the happy pair to Paris, and who is busy packing the new chariot. In respect of this personage, Mr. Towlinson admits, presently, that he never knew of any good that ever come of foreigners; and being charged by the ladies with prejudice, says, Look at Bonapart, who was at the head of 'em, and see what *he* was always up to! Which the housemaid says is very true.

The pastrycook is hard at work in the funereal room in Brook Street, and the very tall young men are busy looking on. One of the very tall young men already smells of sherry, and his eyes have a tendency to become fixed in his head, and to stare at objects without seeing them. The very tall young man is conscious of this failing in himself; and informs his comrade that it's his "exciseman." The very tall young man would say excitement, but his speech is hazy.

The men who play the bells have got scent of the marriage; and the marrow-bones and cleavers too; and a brass band too. The first are practising in a back-settlement near Battle Bridge; the second put themselves in communication, through their chief, with Mr. Towlinson, to whom they offer terms to be bought off; and the third, in the person of an artful trombone, lurks and dodges round the corner, waiting for some traitor tradesman to reveal the place and hour of breakfast for a bribe. Expectation and excitement extend further yet, and take a wider range. From Balls Pond Mr. Perch brings Mrs. Perch to spend the day with Mr. Dombey's servants, and accompany them, surreptitiously, to see the wedding. In Mr. Toots's lodgings, Mr. Toots attires himself as if he were at least the bridegroom: determined to behold the spectacle in splendour from a secret corner of the gallery, and thither to convey the Chicken. For it is Mr. Toots's desperate intent to point out Florence to the Chicken, then and there, and openly to say, "Now, Chicken, I will not deceive you any longer; the friend I have sometimes mentioned to you is myself; Miss Dombey is the object of my passion; what are your opinions, Chicken, in this state of things, and what, on the spot, do you advise?" The so-much-to-be-astonished Chicken, in the meanwhile, dips his beak into a tankard of strong beer in Mr. Toots's kitchen, and pecks up two pounds of beef-steaks. In Princess's Place, Miss Tox is up and doing; for she too, though in sore distress, is resolved to put a shilling in the hands of Mrs. Miff, and see the ceremony, which has a cruel fascination for her, from some lonely corner. The quarters of the Wooden Midshipman are all alive; for Captain Cuttle, in his ankle-

jacks and with a huge shirt collar, is seated at his breakfast, listening to Rob the Grinder as he reads the marriage service to him beforehand, under orders, to the end that the captain may perfectly understand the solemnity he is about to

witness: for which purpose the captain gravely lays injunctions on his chaplain, from time to time, to "put about," or to "overhaul that 'ere article again," or to stick to his own duty, and leave the Amens to him, the captain; one of



"SHE STARTED, STOPPED, AND LOOKED IN."

which he repeats, whenever a pause is made by Rob the Grinder, with sonorous satisfaction.

Besides all this, and much more, twenty nursery-maids in Mr. Dombey's street alone have promised twenty families of little women, whose instinctive interests in nuptials dates from their cradles, that they shall go and see the marriage.

DOMBEY AND SON, 15.

Truly, Mr. Sownds the beadle has good reason to feel himself in office, as he suns his portly figure on the church steps, waiting for the marriage hour. Truly Mrs. Miif has cause to pounce on an unlucky dwarf child, with a giant baby, who peeps in at the porch, and drive her forth with indignation.

Cousin Feenix has come over from abroad expressly to attend the marriage. Cousin Feenix was a man about town forty years ago; but he is still so juvenile in figure and in manner, and so well got up, that strangers are amazed when they discover latent wrinkles in his lordship's face, and crows' feet in his eyes; and when they first observe him, not exactly certain, as he walks across a room, of going quite straight to where he wants to go. But Cousin Feenix, getting up at half-past seven o'clock or so, is quite another thing from Cousin Feenix got up: and very dim indeed he looks while being shaved at Long's Hotel, in Bond Street.

Mr. Dombey leaves his dressing-room, amidst a general whisking away of the women on the staircase, who disperse in all directions, with a great rustling of skirts, except Mrs. Perch, who being (but that she always is) in an interesting situation, is not nimble, and is obliged to face him, and is ready to sink with confusion as she curtsies;—may Heaven avert all evil consequences from the house of Perch! Mr. Dombey walks up to the drawing-room to bide his time. Gorgeous are Mr. Dombey's new blue coat, fawn-coloured pantaloons, and lilac waistcoat; and a whisper goes about the house that Mr. Dombey's hair is curled.

A double knock announces the arrival of the major, who is gorgeous too, and wears a whole geranium in his button-hole, and has his hair curled tight and crisp, as well the native knows.

"Dombey!" says the major, putting out both hands, "how are you?"

"Major," says Mr. Dombey, "how are You?"

"By Jove, sir," says the major, "Joey B. is in such case this morning, sir,"—and here he hits himself hard upon the breast,—“in such case this morning, sir, that, damme, Dombey, he has half a mind to make a double marriage of it, sir, and take the mother.”

Mr. Dombey smiles; but faintly, even for him; for Mr. Dombey feels that he is going to be related to the mother, and that, under those circumstances, she is not to be joked about.

"Dombey," says the major, seeing this, "I give you joy. I congratulate you, Dombey. By the Lord, sir," says the major, "you are more to be envied, this day, than any man in England!"

Here, again, Mr. Dombey's assent is qualified; because he is going to confer a great distinction on a lady; and, no doubt, she is to be envied most.

"As to Edith Granger, sir," pursues the major, "there is not a woman in all Europe but might—and would, sir, you will allow Bagstock to add

—and would—give her ears, and her ear-rings too, to be in Edith Granger's place."

"You are good enough to say so, major," says Mr. Dombey.

"Dombey," returns the major, "you know it. Let us have no false delicacy. You know it. Do you know it, or do you not, Dombey?" says the major, almost in a passion.

"Oh, really, major——"

"Damme, sir," retorts the major, "do you know that fact, or do you not? Dombey! Is old Joe your friend? Are we on that footing of unreserved intimacy, Dombey, that may justify a man—a blunt old Joseph B., sir—in speaking out; or am I to take open order, Dombey, and to keep my distance, and to stand on forms?"

"My dear Major Bagstock," says Mr. Dombey with a gratified air, "you are quite warm."

"By Gad, sir," says the major, "I am warm. Joseph B. does not deny it, Dombey. He is warm. This is an occasion, sir, that calls forth all the honest sympathies remaining in an old, infernal, battered, used-up, invalidated J. B. carcass. And I tell you what, Dombey—at such a time a man must blurt out what he feels, or put a muzzle on; and Joseph Bagstock tells you to your face, Dombey, as he tells his club behind your back, that he never will be muzzled when Paul Dombey is in question. Now, damme, sir," concludes the major with great firmness, "what do you make of that?"

"Major," says Mr. Dombey, "I assure you that I am really obliged to you. I had no idea of checking your too partial friendship."

"Not too partial, sir!" exclaims the choleric major. "Dombey, I deny it!"

"Your friendship I will say, then," pursues Mr. Dombey, "on any account. Nor can I forget, major, on such an occasion as the present, how much I am indebted to it."

"Dombey," says the major, with appropriate action, "that is the hand of Joseph Bagstock; of plain old Joey B., sir, if you like that better! That is the hand of which his Royal Highness the late Duke of York did me the honour to observe, sir, to his Royal Highness the late Duke of Kent, that it was the hand of Josh; a rough and tough, and possibly an up-to-snuff, old vagabond. Dombey, may the present moment be the least unhappy of our lives! God bless you!"

Now enters Mr. Carker, gorgeous likewise, and smiling like a wedding-guest indeed. He can scarcely let Mr. Dombey's hand go, he is so congratulatory; and he shakes the major's hand so heartily at the same time, that his voice

shakes too, in accord with his arms, as it comes sliding from between his teeth.

"The very day is auspicious," says Mr. Carker. "The brightest and most genial weather! I hope I am not a moment late?"

"Punctual to your time, sir," says the major.

"I am rejoiced, I am sure," says Mr. Carker. "I was afraid I might be a few seconds, after the appointed time, for I was delayed by a procession of waggons; and I took the liberty of riding round to Brook Street"—this to Mr. Dombey—"to leave a few poor rarities of flowers for Mrs. Dombey. A man in my position, and so distinguished as to be invited here, is proud to offer some homage in acknowledgment of his vassalage; and, as I have no doubt Mrs. Dombey is overwhelmed with what is costly and magnificent,"—with a strange glance at his patron,—"*I* hope the very poverty of my offering may find favour for it."

"Mrs. Dombey that is to be," returns Mr. Dombey condescendingly, "will be very sensible of your attention, Carker, I am sure."

"And if she is to be Mrs. Dombey this morning, sir," says the major, putting down his coffee-cup, and looking at his watch, "it's high time we were off!"

Forth, in a barouche, ride Mr. Dombey, Major Bagstock, and Mr. Carker to the church. Mr. Sownds the beadle has long risen from the steps, and is in waiting with his cocked-hat in his hand. Mrs. Miff curtsies and proposes chairs in the vestry. Mr. Dombey prefers remaining in the church. As he looks up at the organ, Miss Tox in the gallery shrinks behind the fat leg of a cherubim on a monument, with cheeks like a young Wind. Captain Cuttle, on the contrary, stands up, and waves his hook, in token of welcome and encouragement. Mr. Toots informs the Chicken, behind his hat, that the middle gentleman, he in the fawn-coloured pantaloons, is the father of his love. The Chicken hoarsely whispers Mr. Toots that he's as stiff a cove as ever he see, but that it is within the resources of Science to double him up with one blow in the waistcoat.

Mr. Sownds and Mrs. Miff are eyeing Mr. Dombey from a little distance, when the noise of approaching wheels is heard, and Mr. Sownds goes out, Mrs. Miff meeting Mr. Dombey's eye as it is withdrawn from the presumptuous maniac up-stairs, who salutes him with so much urbanity, drops a curtsy, and informs him that she believes his "good lady" is come. Then there is a crowding and a whispering at the door, and the good lady enters with a haughty step.

There is no sign upon her face of last night's suffering; there is no trace in her manner of the woman on the bended knees, reposing her wild head upon the pillow of the sleeping girl. That girl, all gentle and lovely, is at her side—a striking contrast to her own disdainful and defiant figure, standing there, composed, erect, inscrutable of will, resplendent and majestic in the zenith of its charms, yet beating down, and treading on, the admiration that it challenges.

There is a pause while Mr. Sownds the beadle glides into the vestry for the clergyman and clerk. At this juncture, Mrs. Skewton speaks to Mr. Dombey; more distinctly and emphatically than her custom is, and moving, at the same time, close to Edith.

"My dear Dombey," says the good mamma, "I fear I must relinquish darling Florence after all, and suffer her to go home, as she herself proposed. After my loss of to-day, my dear Dombey, I feel I shall not have spirits, even for her society."

"Had she not better stay with you?" returns the bridegroom.

"I think not, my dear Dombey. No, I think not. I shall be better alone. Besides, my dearest Edith will be her natural and constant guardian when you return, and I had better not encroach upon her trust; perhaps. She might be jealous. Eh, dear Edith?"

The affectionate mamma presses her daughter's arm as she says this: perhaps entreating her attention earnestly.

"To be serious, my dear Dombey," she resumes, "I will relinquish our dear child, and not inflict my gloom upon her. We have settled that just now. She fully understands, dear Dombey. Edith, my dear, she fully understands."

Again the good mother presses her daughter's arm. Mr. Dombey offers no additional remonstrance; for the clergyman and clerk appear; and Mrs. Miff, and Mr. Sownds the beadle, group the party in their proper places at the altar rails.

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

Cousin Feenix does that. He has come from Baden-Baden on purpose. "Confound it," Cousin Feenix says—good-natured creature, Cousin Feenix—"when we *do* get a rich City fellow into the family, let us show him some attention; let us do something for him."

"I give this woman to be married to this man," saith Cousin Feenix, therefore. Cousin Feenix, meaning to go in a straight line, but turning off sideways by reason of his wilful legs,

gives the wrong woman to be married to this man at first—to wit, a bridesmaid of some condition, distantly connected with the family, and ten years Mrs. Skewton's junior—but Mrs. Miff, interposing her mortified bonnet, dexterously turns him back, and runs him, as on casters, full at the "good lady;" whom Cousin Feenix giveth to be married to this man accordingly.

And will they in the sight of Heaven——?

Ay, that they will: Mr. Dombey says he will. And what says Edith? *She will.*

So, from that day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do them part, they plight their troth to one another, and are married.

In a firm, free hand the bride subscribes her name in the register when they adjourn to the vestry. "There an't a many ladies comes here," Mrs. Miff says with a curtsy—to look at Mrs. Miff, at such a season, is to make her mortified bonnet go down, with a dip—"writes their



"IN A FIRM, FREE HAND THE BRIDE SUBSCRIBES HER NAME IN THE REGISTER."

names like this good lady!" Mr. Sownds the beadle thinks it is a truly spanking signature, and worthy of the writer—this, however, between himself and conscience.

Florence signs too, but unapplauded, for her hand shakes. All the party sign; Cousin Feenix last: who puts his noble name into a wrong place, and enrolls himself as having been born that morning.

The major now salutes the bride right gallantly, and carries out that branch of military

tactics in reference to all the ladies: notwithstanding Mrs. Skewton's being extremely hard to kiss, and squeaking shrilly in the sacred edifice. The example is followed by Cousin Feenix, and even by Mr. Dombey. Lastly, Mr. Carker, with his white teeth glistening, approaches Edith more as if he meant to bite her than to taste the sweets that linger on her lips.

There is a glow upon her proud cheek, and a flashing in her eyes, that may be meant to stay him; but it does not, for he salutes her

as the rest have done, and wishes her all happiness.

"If wishes," says he in a low voice, "are not superfluous, applied to such a union."

"I thank you, sir," she answers, with a curled lip and a heaving bosom.

But, does Edith feel still, as on the night when she knew that Mr. Dombey would return to offer his alliance, that Carker knows her thoroughly, and reads her right, and that she is more degraded by his knowledge of her than by aught else? Is it for this reason that her haughtiness shrinks beneath his smile, like snow within the hand that grasps it firmly, and that her imperious glance droops in meeting his, and seeks the ground?

"I am proud to see," says Mr. Carker, with a servile stooping of his neck, which the revelations making by his eyes and teeth proclaim to be a lie, "I am proud to see that my humble offering is graced by Mrs. Dombey's hand, and permitted to hold so favoured a place in so joyful an occasion."

Though she bends her head in answer, there is something in the momentary action of her hand, as if she would crush the flowers it holds, and fling them, with contempt, upon the ground. But, she puts the hand through the arm of her new husband, who has been standing near, conversing with the major, and is proud again, and motionless, and silent.

The carriages are once more at the church-door. Mr. Dombey, with his bride upon his arm, conducts her through the twenty families of little women who are on the steps, and every one of whom remembers the fashion, and the colour of her every article of dress from that moment, and reproduces it on her doll, who is for ever being married. Cleopatra and Cousin Feenix enter the same carriage. The major hands into a second carriage Florence, and the bridesmaid who so narrowly escaped being given away by mistake, and then enters it himself, and is followed by Mr. Carker. Horses prance and caper; coachmen and footmen shine in fluttering favours, flowers, and new-made liveries. Away they dash and rattle through the streets; and, as they pass along, a thousand heads are turned to look at them, and a thousand sober moralists revenge themselves for not being married too, that morning, by reflecting that these people little think such happiness can last.

Miss Tox emerges from behind the cherubim's leg when all is quiet, and comes slowly down from the gallery. Miss Tox's eyes are red, and her pocket-handkerchief is damp. She is wounded, but not exasperated, and she hopes

they may be happy. She quite admits to herself the beauty of the bride, and her own comparatively feeble and faded attractions; but the stately image of Mr. Dombey, in his lilac waistcoat and his fawn-coloured pantaloons, is present to her mind, and Miss Tox weeps afresh, behind her veil, on her way home to Princess's Place. Captain Cuttle, having joined in all the amens and responses with a devout growl, feels much improved by his religious exercises; and, in a peaceful frame of mind, pervades the body of the church, glazed hat in hand, and reads the tablet to the memory of little Paul. The gallant Mr. Toots, attended by the faithful Chicken, leaves the building in torments of love. The Chicken is as yet unable to elaborate a scheme for winning Florence, but his first idea has gained possession of him, and he thinks the doubling up of Mr. Dombey would be a move in the right direction. Mr. Dombey's servants come out of their hiding-places, and prepare to rush to Brook Street, when they are delayed by symptoms of indisposition on the part of Mrs. Perch, who entreats a glass of water and becomes alarming; Mrs. Perch gets better soon, however, and is borne away; and Mrs. Miff, and Mr. Sownds the beadle, sit upon the steps to count what they have gained by the affair, and talk it over, while the sexton tolls a funeral.

Now, the carriages arrive at the bride's residence, and the players on the bells begin to jingle, and the band strikes up, and Mr. Punch, that model of connubial bliss, salutes his wife. Now, the people run and push, and press round in a gaping throng, while Mr. Dombey, leading Mrs. Dombey by the hand, advances solemnly into the Feenix halls. Now, the rest of the wedding-party alight, and enter after them. And why does Mr. Carker, passing through the people to the hall-door, think of the old woman who called to him in the grove that morning? Or why does Florence, as she passes, think, with a tremble, of her childhood, when she was lost, and of the visage of good Mrs. Brown?

Now, there are more congratulations on this happiest of days, and more company, though not much; and now they leave the drawing-room, and range themselves at table in the dark brown dining-room, which no confectioner can brighten up, let him garnish the exhausted negroes with as many flowers and love-knots as he will.

The pastrycook has done his duty like a man, though, and a rich breakfast is set forth. Mr. and Mrs. Chick have joined the party, among others. Mrs. Chick admires that Edith should be, by nature, such a perfect Dombey; and is

affable and confidential to Mrs. Skewton, whose mind is relieved of a great load, and who takes her share of the champagne. The very tall young man, who suffered from excitement early, is better: but a vague sentiment of repentance has seized upon him, and he hates the other very tall young man, and wrests dishes from him by violence, and takes a grim delight in disobliging the company. The company are cool and calm, and do not outrage the black hatchments of pictures looking down upon them by any excess of mirth. Cousin Feenix and the major are the gayest there; but Mr. Carker has a smile for the whole table. He has an especial smile for the bride, who very, very seldom meets it.

Cousin Feenix rises when the company have breakfasted, and the servants have left the room; and wonderfully young he looks, with his white wristbands almost covering his hands (otherwise rather bony), and the bloom of the champagne in his cheeks.

"Upon my honour," says Cousin Feenix, "although it's an unusual sort of thing in a private gentleman's house, I must beg leave to call upon you to drink what is usually called a—in fact, a toast."

The major very hoarsely indicates his approval. Mr. Carker, bending his head forward over the table in the direction of Cousin Feenix, smiles and nods a great many times.

"A—in fact, it's not a——" Cousin Feenix beginning again, thus, comes to a dead stop.

"Hear, hear!" says the major in a tone of conviction.

Mr. Carker softly claps his hands, and bending forward over the table again, smiles and nods a great many more times than before, as if he were particularly struck by this last observation, and desired personally to express his sense of the good it has done him.

"It is," says Cousin Feenix, "an occasion, in fact, when the general usages of life may be a little departed from without impropriety; and although I never was an orator in my life, and when I was in the House of Commons, and had the honour of seconding the address, was—in fact, laid up for a fortnight with the consciousness of failure——"

The major and Mr. Carker are so much delighted by this fragment of personal history, that Cousin Feenix laughs, and, addressing them individually, goes on to say:

"And, in point of fact, when I was devilish ill—still, you know, I feel that a duty devolves upon me. And when a duty devolves upon an Englishman, he is bound to get out of it, in my opinion, in the best way he can. Well! our

family has had the gratification, to-day, of connecting itself, in the person of my lovely and accomplished relative, whom I now see—in point of fact, present——"

Here there is general applause.

"Present," repeats Cousin Feenix, feeling that it is a neat point which will bear repetition,—"with one who—that is to say, with a man at whom the finger of scorn can never—in fact, with my honourable friend Dombey, if he will allow me to call him so."

Cousin Feenix bows to Mr. Dombey; Mr. Dombey solemnly returns the bow; everybody is more or less gratified and affected by this extraordinary, and perhaps unprecedented, appeal to the feelings.

"I have not," says Cousin Feenix, "enjoyed those opportunities which I could have desired, of cultivating the acquaintance of my friend Dombey, and studying those qualities which do equal honour to his head, and, in point of fact, to his heart; for it has been my misfortune to be, as we used to say in my time in the House of Commons, when it was not the custom to allude to the Lords, and when the order of parliamentary proceedings was perhaps better observed than it is now—to be in—in point of fact," says Cousin Feenix, cherishing his joke with great slyness, and finally bringing it out with a jerk, "'in another place!'"

The major falls into convulsions, and is recovered with difficulty.

"But I know sufficient of my friend Dombey," resumes Cousin Feenix in a graver tone, as if he had suddenly become a sadder and a wiser man, "to know that he is, in point of fact, what may be emphatically called a—a merchant—a British merchant—and a—and a man. And although I have been resident abroad for some years (it would give me great pleasure to receive my friend Dombey, and everybody here, at Baden-Baden, and to have an opportunity of making 'em known to the Grand Duke), still I know enough, I flatter myself, of my lovely and accomplished relative, to know that she possesses every requisite to make a man happy, and that her marriage with my friend Dombey is one of inclination and affection on both sides."

Many smiles and nods from Mr. Carker.

"Therefore," says Cousin Feenix, "I congratulate the family of which I am a member on the acquisition of my friend Dombey. I congratulate my friend Dombey on his union with my lovely and accomplished relative, who possesses every requisite to make a man happy; and I take the liberty of calling on you all, in point of fact, to congratulate both my friend

Dombey and my lovely and accomplished relative on the present occasion."

The speech of Cousin Feenix is received with great applause, and Mr. Dombey returns thanks on behalf of himself and Mrs. Dombey. J. B. shortly afterwards proposes Mrs. Skewton. The breakfast languishes when that is done, the violated hatchments are avenged, and Edith rises to assume her travelling dress.

All the servants, in the meantime, have been breakfasting below. Champagne has grown too common among them to be mentioned, and roast fowls, raised pies, and lobster salad have become mere drugs. The very tall young man has recovered his spirits, and again alludes to the exciseman. His comrade's eye begins to emulate his own, and he too stares at objects without taking cognizance thereof. There is a general redness in the faces of the ladies; in the face of Mrs. Perch particularly, who is joyous and beaming, and lifted so far above the cares of life, that if she were asked just now to direct a wayfarer to Balls Pond, where her own cares lodge, she would have some difficulty in recalling the way. Mr. Towlinson has proposed the happy pair; to which the silver-headed butler has responded neatly, and with emotion; for he half begins to think he *is* an old retainer of the family, and that he is bound to be affected by these changes. The whole party, and especially the ladies, are very frolicsome. Mr. Dombey's cook, who generally takes the lead in society, has said, It is impossible to settle down after this, and why not go, in a party, to the play? Everybody (Mrs. Perch included) has agreed to this; even the native, who is tigerish in his drink, and who alarms the ladies (Mrs. Perch particularly) by the rolling of his eyes. One of the very tall young men has even proposed a ball after the play, and it presents itself to no one (Mrs. Perch included) in the light of an impossibility. Words have arisen between the housemaid and Mr. Towlinson; she, on the authority of an old saw, asserting marriages to be made in heaven: he affecting to trace the manufacture elsewhere; he supposing that she says so, because she thinks of being married her own self; she saying, Lord forbid, at any rate, that she should ever marry *him*. To calm these flying taunts, the silver-headed butler rises to propose the health of Mr. Towlinson, whom to know is to esteem, and to esteem is to wish well settled in life with the object of his choice, wherever (here the silver-headed butler eyes the housemaid) she may be. Mr. Towlinson returns thanks in a speech replete with feeling, of which the peroration turns on

foreigners, regarding whom he says they may find favour, sometimes, with weak and inconstant intellects that can be led away by hair, but all he hopes is, he may never hear of no foreigner never boning nothing out of no travelling chariot. The eye of Mr. Towlinson is so severe and so expressive here, that the housemaid is turning hysterical, when she and all the rest, roused by the intelligence that the Bride is going away, hurry up-stairs to witness her departure.

The chariot is at the door; the Bride is descending to the hall, where Mr. Dombey waits for her. Florence is ready on the staircase to depart too; and Miss Nipper, who has held a middle state between the parlour and the kitchen, is prepared to accompany her. As Edith appears, Florence hastens towards her, to bid her farewell.

Is Edith cold, that she should tremble? Is there anything unnatural or unwholesome in the touch of Florence, that the beautiful form recedes and contracts, as if it could not bear it? Is there so much hurry in this going away, that Edith, with a wave of her hand, sweeps on, and is gone?

Mrs. Skewton, overpowered by her feelings as a mother, sinks on her sofa in the Cleopatra attitude, when the clatter of the chariot wheels is lost, and sheds several tears. The major, coming with the rest of the company from table, endeavours to comfort her; but she will not be comforted on any terms, and so the major takes his leave. Cousin Feenix takes his leave, and Mr. Carker takes his leave. The guests all go away. Cleopatra, left alone, feels a little giddy from her strong emotion, and falls asleep.

Giddiness prevails below-stairs too. The very tall young man, whose excitement came on so soon, appears to have his head glued to the table in the pantry, and cannot be detached from it. A violent revulsion has taken place in the spirits of Mrs. Perch, who is low on account of Mr. Perch; and tells cook that she fears he is not so much attached to his home as he used to be, when they were only nine in family. Mr. Towlinson has a singing in his ears, and a large wheel going round and round inside his head. The housemaid wishes it wasn't wicked to wish that one was dead.

There is a general delusion likewise, in these lower regions, on the subject of time; everybody conceiving that it ought to be, at the earliest, ten o'clock at night, whereas it is not yet three in the afternoon. A shadowy idea of wickedness committed haunts every individual in the party; and each one secretly thinks the other a

companion in guilt, whom it would be agreeable to avoid. No man or woman has the hardihood to hint at the projected visit to the play. Any one reviving the notion of the ball would be scouted as a malignant idiot.

Mrs. Skewton sleeps up-stairs two hours afterwards, and naps are not yet over in the kitchen. The hatchments in the dining-room look down on crumbs, dirty plates, spillings of wine, half-thawed ice, stale discoloured heel-taps, scraps of lobster, drum-sticks of fowls, and pensive jellies, gradually resolving themselves into a lukewarm, gummy soup. The marriage is, by this time, almost as denuded of its show and garnish as the breakfast. Mr. Dombey's servants moralise so much about it, and are so repentant over their early tea at home, that, by eight o'clock or so, they settle down into confirmed seriousness; and Mr. Perch, arriving at that time from the City, fresh and jocular, with a white waistcoat and a comic song, ready to spend the evening, and prepared for any amount of dissipation, is amazed to find himself coldly received, and Mrs. Perch but poorly, and to have the pleasing duty of escorting that lady home by the next omnibus.

Night closes in. Florence, having rambled through the handsome house, from room to room, seeks her own chamber, where the care of Edith has surrounded her with luxuries and comforts; and, divesting herself of her handsome dress, puts on her old simple mourning for dear Paul, and sits down to read, with Diogenes winking and blinking on the ground beside her. But Florence cannot read to-night. The house seems strange and new, and there are loud echoes in it. There is a shadow on her heart: she knows not why or what: but it is heavy. Florence shuts her book, and gruff Diogenes, who takes that for a signal, puts his paws upon her lap, and rubs his ears against her caressing hands. But Florence cannot see him plainly in a little time, for there is a mist between her eyes and him, and her dead brother and dead mother shine in it like angels. Walter, too, poor, wandering, shipwrecked boy, oh, where is he?

The major don't know; that's for certain; and don't care. The major, having choked and slumbered all the afternoon, has taken a late dinner at his club, and now sits over his pint of wine, driving a modest young man, with a fresh-coloured face, at the next table (who would give a handsome sum to be able to rise and go away, but cannot do it) to the verge of madness, by anecdotes of Bagstock, sir, at Dombey's wedding, and old Joe's devilish gentlemanly friend,

Lord Feenix. While Cousin Feenix, who ought to be at Long's, and in bed, finds himself, instead, at a gaming-table, where his wilful legs have taken him, perhaps, in his own despatch.

Night, like a giant, fills the church, from pavement to roof, and holds dominion through the silent hours. Pale dawn again comes peeping through the windows; and, giving place to day, sees night withdraw into the vaults, and follows it, and drives it out, and hides among the dead. The timid mice again cower close together when the great door clashes, and Mr. Sownds and Mrs. Miff, treading the circle of their daily lives; unbroken as a marriage ring, come in. Again the cocked-hat and the mortified bonnet stand in the background at the marriage hour; and again this man taketh this woman, and this woman taketh this man, on the solemn terms:

"To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do them part."

The very words that Mr. Carker rides into town repeating, with his mouth stretched to the utmost, as he picks his dainty way.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WOODEN MIDSHIPMAN GOES TO PIECES.

HONEST Captain Cuttle, as the weeks flew over him in his fortified retreat, by no means abated any of his prudent provisions against surprise, because of the non-appearance of the enemy. The captain argued that his present security was too profound and wonderful to endure much longer; he knew that, when the wind stood in a fair quarter, the weather-cock was seldom nailed there; and he was too well acquainted with the determined and dauntless character of Mrs. MacStinger to doubt that that heroic woman had devoted herself to the task of his discovery and capture. Trembling beneath the weight of these reasons, Captain Cuttle lived a very close and retired life; seldom stirring abroad until after dark; venturing even then only into the obscurest streets; never going forth at all on Sundays; and, both within and without the walls of his retreat, avoiding bonnets, as if they were worn by raging lions.

The captain never dreamed that, in the event of his being pounced upon by Mrs. MacStinger in his walks, it would be possible to offer resist-

ance. He felt that it could not be done. He saw himself, in his mind's eye, put meekly in a hackney coach, and carried off to his old lodgings. He foresaw that, once immured there, he was a lost man: his hat gone; Mrs. MacStinger watchful of him day and night; reproaches heaped upon his head before the infant family; himself the guilty object of suspicion and distrust: an ogre in the children's eyes, and, in their mother's a detected traitor.

A violent perspiration and a lowness of spirits always came over the captain as this gloomy picture presented itself to his imagination. It generally did so previous to his stealing out of doors at night for air and exercise. Sensible of the risk he ran, the captain took leave of Rob, at those times, with the solemnity which became a man who might never return: exhorting him, in the event of his (the captain's) being lost sight of for a time, to tread in the paths of virtue, and keep the brazen instruments well polished.

But not to throw away a chance, and to secure to himself a means, in case of the worst, of holding communication with the external world, Captain Cuttle soon conceived the happy idea of teaching Rob the Grinder some secret signal, by which that adherent might make his presence and fidelity known to his commander in the hour of adversity. After much cogitation, the captain decided in favour of instructing him to whistle the marine melody, "Oh cheerily, cheerily!" and Rob the Grinder attaining a point as near perfection in that accomplishment as a landsman could hope to reach, the captain impressed these mysterious instructions on his mind:

"Now, my lad, stand by! If ever I'm took—"

"Took, captain!" interposed Rob, with his round eyes wide open.

"Ah!" said Captain Cuttle darkly, "if ever I goes away, meaning to come back to supper, and don't come within hail again twenty-four hours arter my loss, go you to Brig Place, and whistle that ere tune near my old moorings—not as if you was a meaning of it, you understand, but as if you'd drifted there promiscuous. If I answer in that tune, you sheer off, my lad, and come back four-and-twenty hours arterwards; if I answer in another tune, do you stand off and on, and wait till I throw out further signals. Do you understand them orders, now?"

"What am I to stand off and on of, captain?" inquired Rob. "The horse road?"

"Here's a smart lad for you!" cried the captain, eyeing him sternly, "as don't know his

own native alphabet! Go away a bit and come back again alternate—d'ye understand that?"

"Yes, captain," said Rob.

"Very good, my lad, then," said the captain, relenting. "Do it!"

That he might do it the better, Captain Cuttle sometimes condescended of an evening, after the shop was shut, to rehearse the scene: retiring into the parlour for the purpose, as into the lodgings of a supposititious MacStinger, and carefully observing the behaviour of his ally, from the hole of espial he had cut in the wall. Rob the Grinder discharged himself of his duty with so much exactness and judgment, when thus put to the proof, that the captain presented him, at divers times, with seven shillings, in token of satisfaction; and gradually felt stealing over his spirit the resignation of a man who had made provision for the worst, and taken every reasonable precaution against an unrelenting fate.

Nevertheless, the captain did not tempt ill-fortune by being a whit more venturesome than before. Though he considered it a point of good-breeding in himself, as a general friend of the family, to attend Mr. Dombey's wedding (of which he had heard from Mr. Perch), and to show that gentleman a pleasant and approving countenance from the gallery, he had repaired to the church in a hackney cabriolet, with both windows up; and might have scrupled even to make that venture, in his dread of Mrs. MacStinger, but that the lady's attendance on the ministry of the Reverend Melchisedech rendered it peculiarly unlikely that she would be found in communion with the Establishment.

The captain got safe home again, and fell into the ordinary routine of his new life, without encountering any more direct alarm from the enemy than was suggested to him by the daily bonnets in the street. But, other subjects began to lie heavier on the captain's mind. Walter's ship was still unheard of. No news came of old Sol Gills. Florence did not even know of the old man's disappearance, and Captain Cuttle had not the heart to tell her. Indeed, the captain, as his own hopes of the generous, handsome, gallant-hearted youth whom he had loved, according to his rough manner, from a child, began to fade, and faded more and more from day to day, shrunk with instinctive pain from the thought of exchanging a word with Florence. If he had had good news to carry to her, the honest captain would have braved the newly-decorated house and splendid furniture—though these, connected with the lady he had seen at church, were awful to him—and made his way into her presence. With a dark horizon

gathering around their common hopes, however, which darkened every hour, the captain almost felt as if he were a new misfortune and affliction to her; and was scarcely less afraid of a visit from Florence than from Mrs. MacStinger herself.

It was a chill, dark, autumn evening, and Captain Cuttle had ordered a fire to be kindled in the little back-parlour, now more than ever like the cabin of a ship. The rain fell fast, and the wind blew hard; and straying out on the housetop by that stormy bedroom of his old friend, to take an observation of the weather, the captain's heart died within him when he saw how wild and desolate it was. Not that he associated the weather of that time with poor Walter's destiny, or doubted that, if Providence had doomed him to be lost and shipwrecked, it was over long ago; but that beneath an outward influence quite distinct from the subject-matter of his thoughts, the captain's spirits sank, and his hopes turned pale, as those of wiser men had often done before him, and will often do again.

Captain Cuttle, addressing his face to the snap wind and slanting rain, looked up at the heavy scud that was flying fast over the wilderness of housetops, and looked for something cheery there in vain. The prospect near at hand was no better. In sundry tea-chests, and other rough boxes at his feet, the pigeons of Rob the Grinder were cooing like so many dismal breezes getting up. A crazy weather-cock of a midshipman with a telescope at his eye, once visible from the street, but long bricked out, creaked and complained upon his rusty pivot as the shrill blast spun him round and round, and sported with him cruelly. Upon the captain's coarse blue vest the cold rain-drops started like steel beads; and he could hardly maintain himself aslant against the stiff nor-wester that came pressing against him, importunate to topple him over the parapet, and throw him on the pavement below. If there were any Hope alive that evening, the captain thought, as he held his hat on, it certainly kept house, and wasn't out of doors; so the captain, shaking his head in a despondent manner, went in to look for it.

Captain Cuttle descended slowly to the little back-parlour, and, seated in his accustomed chair, looked for it in the fire; but it was not there, though the fire was bright. He took out his tobacco-box and pipe, and, composing himself to smoke, looked for it in the red glow from the bowl, and in the wreaths of vapour that curled upward from his lips; but there was not so much as an atom of the rust of Hope's anchor

in either. He tried a glass of grog; but melancholy truth was at the bottom of that well, and he couldn't finish it. He made a turn or two in the shop, and looked for Hope among the instruments; but they obstinately worked out reckonings for the missing ship, in spite of any opposition he could offer, that ended at the bottom of the lone sea.

The wind still rushing, and the rain still pattering, against the closed shutters, the captain brought to before the Wooden Midshipman upon the counter, and thought, as he dried the little officer's uniform with his sleeve, how many years the Midshipman had seen, during which few changes—hardly any—had transpired among his ship's company; how the changes had come all together one day, as it might be; and of what a sweeping kind they were. Here was the little society of the back-parlour broken up, and scattered far and wide. Here was no audience for Lovely Peg, even if there had been anybody to sing it, which there was not; for the captain was as morally certain that nobody but he could execute that ballad as he was that he had not the spirit, under existing circumstances, to attempt it. There was no bright face of "Wal'r" in the house;—here the captain transferred his sleeve for a moment from the Midshipman's uniform to his own cheek;—the familiar wig and buttons of Sol Gills were a vision of the past; Richard Whittington was knocked on the head; and every plan and project, in connection with the Midshipman, lay drifting, without mast or rudder, on the waste of waters.

As the captain, with a dejected face, stood revolving these thoughts, and polishing the Midshipman, partly in the tenderness of old acquaintance, and partly in the absence of his mind, a knocking at the shop-door communicated a frightful start to the frame of Rob the Grinder seated on the counter, whose large eyes had been intently fixed on the captain's face, and who had been debating within himself, for the five hundredth time, whether the captain could have done a murder, that he had such an evil conscience, and was always running away.

"What's that?" said Captain Cuttle softly.

"Somebody's knuckles, captain," answered Rob the Grinder.

The captain, with an abashed and guilty air, immediately sneaked on tiptoe to the little parlour, and locked himself in. Rob, opening the door, would have parleyed with the visitor on the threshold, if the visitor had come in female guise; but the figure being of the male sex, and Rob's orders only applying to women, Rob held the door open, and allowed

it to enter: which it did very quickly, glad to get out of the driving rain.

"A job for Burgess and Co. at any rate," said the visitor, looking over his shoulder compassionately at his own legs, which were very wet, and covered with splashes. "Oh, how do do, Mr. Gills?"

The salutation was addressed to the captain, now emerging from the back-parlour with a most transparent and utterly futile affectation of coming out by accident.

"Thankee," the gentleman went on to say in the same breath; "I'm very well indeed myself, I'm much obliged to you. My name is Toots—*Mister Toots.*"

The captain remembered to have seen this young gentleman at the wedding, and made him a bow. Mr. Toots replied with a chuckle; and being embarrassed, as he generally was, breathed hard, shook hands with the captain for a long time, and then falling on Rob the Grinder, in the absence of any other resource, shook hands with him in a most affectionate and cordial manner.

"I say! I should like to speak a word to you, Mr. Gills, if you please," said Toots at length, with surprising presence of mind. "I say! Miss D. O. M., you know!"

The captain, with responsive gravity and mystery, immediately waved his hook towards the little parlour, whither Mr. Toots followed him.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, though," said Mr. Toots, looking up in the captain's face, as he sat down in a chair by the fire, which the captain placed for him; "you don't happen to know the Chicken at all; do you, Mr. Gills?"

"The Chicken?" said the captain.

"The Game Chicken," said Mr. Toots.

The captain shaking his head, Mr. Toots explained that the man alluded to was the celebrated public character who had covered himself and his country with glory in his contest with the Nobby Shropshire One; but this piece of information did not appear to enlighten the captain very much.

"Because he's outside: that's all," said Mr. Toots. "But it's of no consequence; he won't get very wet, perhaps."

"I can pass the word for him in a moment," said the captain.

"Well, if you *would* have the goodness to let him sit in the shop with your young man," chuckled Mr. Toots, "I should be glad; because, you know, he's easily offended, and the damp's rather bad for his stamina. I'll call him in, Mr. Gills."

With that, Mr. Toots, repairing to the shop-door, sent a peculiar whistle into the night, which produced a stoical gentleman in a shaggy white great-coat and a flat-brimmed hat, with very short hair, a broken nose, and a considerable tract of bare and sterile country behind each ear.

"Sit down, Chicken," said Mr. Toots.

The compliant Chicken spat out some small pieces of straw on which he was regaling himself, and took in a fresh supply from a reserve he carried in his hand.

"There an't no drain of nothing short handy, is there?" said the Chicken generally. "This here sluicing night is hard lines to a man as lives on his condition."

Captain Cuttle proffered a glass of rum, which the Chicken, throwing back his head, emptied into himself, as into a cask, after proposing the brief sentiment, "Towards us!" Mr. Toots and the captain returning then to the parlour, and taking their seats before the fire, Mr. Toots began:

"Mr. Gills——"

"Awast!" said the captain. "My name's Cuttle."

Mr. Toots looked greatly disconcerted, while the captain proceeded gravely:

"Cap'n Cuttle is my name, and England is my nation, this here is my dwelling-place, and blessed be creation—Job," said the captain, as an index to his authority.

"Oh! I couldn't see Mr. Gills, could I?" said Mr. Toots; "because——"

"If you could see Sol Gills, young gen'l'm'n," said the captain impressively, and laying his heavy hand on Mr. Toots's knee, "old Sol, mind you—with your own eyes—as you sit there—you'd be welcomer to me than a wind astarn to a ship becalmed. But you can't see Sol Gills. And why can't you see Sol Gills?" said the captain, apprised by the face of Mr. Toots that he was making a profound impression on that gentleman's mind. "Because he's invisible."

Mr. Toots, in his agitation, was going to reply that it was of no consequence at all. But he corrected himself, and said, "Lor bless me!"

"That there man," said the captain, "has left me in charge here by a piece of writing, but though he was a'most as good as my sworn brother, I know no more where he's gone, or why he's gone—if so be to seek his nevy, or if so be along of being not quite settled in his mind—than you do. One morning, at day-break, he went over the side," said the captain,

"without a splash, without a ripple. I have looked for that man high and low, and never set eyes, nor ears, nor nothing else upon him, from that hour."

"But, good gracious, Miss Dombey don't know——" Mr. Toots began.

"Why, I ask you, as a feeling heart," said the captain, dropping his voice, "why should she know? Why should she be made to know until such time as there warn't any help for it? She took to old Sol Gills, did that sweet creetur, with a kindness, with a affability, with a—— What's the good of saying so? You know her."

"I should hope so," chuckled Mr. Toots, with a conscious blush that suffused his whole countenance.

"And you come here from her?" said the captain.

"I should think so," chuckled Mr. Toots.

"Then all I need observe is," said the captain, "that you know an angel, and are chartered by an angel."

Mr. Toots instantly seized the captain's hand, and requested the favour of his friendship.

"Upon my word and honour," said Mr. Toots earnestly, "I should be very much obliged to you if you'd improve my acquaintance. I should like to know you, captain, very much. I really am in want of a friend, I am. Little Dombey was my friend at old Blimber's, and would have been now, if he'd have lived. The Chicken," said Mr. Toots in a forlorn whisper, "is very well—admirable in his way—the sharpest man, perhaps, in the world; there's not a move he isn't up to; everybody says so—but I don't know—he's not everything. So she *is* an angel, captain. If there is an angel anywhere, it's Miss Dombey. That's what I've always said. Really though, you know," said Mr. Toots, "I should be very much obliged to you if you'd cultivate my acquaintance."

Captain Cuttle received this proposal in a polite manner, but still without committing himself to its acceptance; merely observing, "Ay, ay, my lad. We shall see, we shall see;" and reminding Mr. Toots of his immediate mission, by inquiring to what he was indebted for the honour of that visit.

"Why, the fact is," replied Mr. Toots, "that it's the young woman I come from. Not Miss Dombey—Susan, you know."

The captain nodded his head once, with a grave expression of face, indicative of his regarding that young woman with serious respect.

"And I'll tell you how it happens," said Mr. Toots. "You know, I go and call sometimes on Miss Dombey. I don't go there on purpose,

you know, but I happen to be in the neighbourhood very often; and when I find myself there, why—why, I call."

"Nat'rally," observed the captain.

"Yes," said Mr. Toots. "I called this afternoon. Upon my word and honour, I don't think it's possible to form an idea of the angel Miss Dombey was this afternoon."

The captain answered with a jerk of his head, implying that it might not be easy to some people, but was quite so to him.

"As I was coming out," said Mr. Toots, "the young woman, in the most unexpected manner, took me into the pantry."

The captain seemed, for the moment, to object to this proceeding; and leaning back in his chair, looked at Mr. Toots with a distrustful, if not threatening visage.

"Where she brought out," said Mr. Toots, "this newspaper. She told me that she had kept it from Miss Dombey all day, on account of something that was in it, about somebody that she and Dombey used to know; and then she read the passage to me. Very well. Then she said—— Wait a minute; what was it she said, though?"

Mr. Toots, endeavouring to concentrate his mental powers on this question, unintentionally fixed the captain's eye, and was so much decomposed by its stern expression, that his difficulty in resuming the thread of his subject was enhanced to a painful extent.

"Oh!" said Mr. Toots after long consideration. "Oh, ah! Yes! She said that she hoped there was a bare possibility that it mightn't be true; and that as she couldn't very well come out herself, without surprising Miss Dombey, would I go down to Mr. Solomon Gills the Instrument-maker's in this street, who was the party's uncle, and ask whether he believed it was true, or had heard anything else in the City. She said, if he couldn't speak to me, no doubt Captain Cuttle could. By-the-bye!" said Mr. Toots, as the discovery flashed upon him, "you, you know!"

The captain glanced at the newspaper in Mr. Toots's hand, and breathed short and hurriedly.

"Well," pursued Mr. Toots, "the reason why I'm rather late is, because I went up as far as Finchley first, to get some uncommonly fine chickweed that grows there, for Miss Dombey's bird. But I came on here directly afterwards. You've seen the paper, I suppose?"

The captain, who had become cautious of reading the news, lest he should find himself advertised at full length by Mrs. MacStinger, shook his head.

"Shall I read the passage to you?" inquired Mr. Toots.

The captain making a sign in the affirmative, Mr. Toots read as follows, from the Shipping Intelligence :

"Southampton. The bark *Defiance*, Henry James, Commander, arrived in this port to-day, with a cargo of sugar, coffee, and rum, reports that, being becalmed on the sixth day of her passage home from Jamaica, in—in such and such a latitude, you know——" said Mr. Toots, after making a feeble dash at the figures, and tumbling over them.

"Ay!" cried the captain, striking his clenched hand on the table. "Heave ahead, my lad!"

"—Latitude," repeated Mr. Toots, with a startled glance at the captain, "and longitude so-and-so,— the look-out observed, half an hour before sunset, some fragments of a wreck, drifting at about the distance of a mile. The weather being clear, and the bark making no way, a boat was hoisted out, with orders to inspect the same, when they were found to consist of sundry large spars, and a part of the main rigging of an English brig, of about five hundred tons burden, together with a portion of the stern, on which the words and letters "Son and H——" were yet plainly legible. No vestige of any dead body was to be seen upon the floating fragments. Log of the *Defiance* states, that a breeze springing up in the night, the wreck was seen no more. There can be no doubt that all surmises as to the fate of the missing vessel, the *Son and Heir*, port of London, bound for Barbadoes, are now set at rest for ever; that she broke up in the last hurricane; and that every soul on board perished."

Captain Cuttle, like all mankind, little knew how much hope had survived within him under discouragement, until he felt its death-shock. During the reading of the paragraph, and for a minute or two afterwards, he sat with his gaze fixed on the modest Mr. Toots, like a man entranced; then, suddenly rising, and putting on his glazed hat, which, in his visitor's honour, he had laid upon the table, the captain turned his back, and bent his head down on the little chimney-piece.

"Oh! upon my word and honour," cried Mr. Toots, whose tender heart was moved by the captain's unexpected distress, "this is a most wretched sort of affair, this world is! Somebody's always dying, or going and doing something uncomfortable in it. I'm sure I never should have looked forward so much to coming into my property, if I had known this. I never saw such a world. It's, a great deal worse than *Blimber's*."

Captain Cuttle, without altering his position, signed to Mr. Toots not to mind him; and presently turned round, with his glazed hat thrust back upon his ears, and his hand composing and smoothing his brown face.

"Wal'r, my dear lad," said the captain, "farewell! Wal'r, my child, my boy, and man, I loved you! He warn't my flesh and blood," said the captain, looking at the fire—"I an't got none—but something of what a father feels when he loses a son, I feel in losing Wal'r. For why?" said the captain. "Because it an't one loss, but a round dozen. Where's that there young school-boy with the rosy face and curly hair, that used to be as merry in this here parlour, come round every week, as a piece of music? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there fresh lad, that nothing couldn't tire nor put out, and that sparkled up and blushed so, when we joked him about *Heart's Delight*, that he was beautiful to look at? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there man's spirit, all afire, that wouldn't see the old man hove down for a minute, and cared nothing for itself? Gone down with Wal'r. It an't one Wal'r. There was a dozen Wal'r's that I knowed, and loved, all holding round his neck when he went down, and they're a holding round mine now!"

Mr. Toots sat silent: folding and refolding the newspaper as small as possible upon his knee.

"And Sol Gills," said the captain, gazing at the fire, "poor nevyless old Sol, where are *you* got to? You was left in charge of me; his last words was, 'Take care of my uncle!' What came over *you*, Sol, when you went and gave the go-by to Ned Cuttle; and what am I to put in my accounts, that he's a looking down upon, respecting you? Sol Gills, Sol Gills!" said the captain, shaking his head slowly, "catch sight of that there newspaper, away from home, with no one as knowed Wal'r by to say a word; and broadside-to you broach, and down you pitch, head foremost!"

Drawing a heavy sigh, the captain turned to Mr. Toots, and roused himself to a sustained consciousness of that gentleman's presence.

"My lad," said the captain, "you must tell the young woman honestly that this here fatal news is too correct. They don't romance, you see, on such pints. It's entered on the ship's log, and that's the truest book as a man can write. To-morrow morning," said the captain, "I'll step out and make inquiries; but they'll lead to no good. They can't do it. If you'll give me a look-in in the forenoon, you shall know what I have heard; but tell the young woman, from

Cap'en Cuttle, that it's over. Over!" And the captain, hooking off his glazed hat, pulled his handkerchief out of the crown, wiped his grizzled head despairingly, and tossed the handkerchief in again, with the indifference of deep dejection.

"Oh! I assure you," said Mr. Toots, "really I am dreadfully sorry. Upon my word I am, though I wasn't acquainted with the party. Do you think Miss Dombey will be very much affected, Captain Gills—I mean Mr. Cuttle?"

"Why, Lord love you," returned the captain, with something of compassion for Mr. Toots's innocence, "when she warn't no higher than that, they were as fond of one another as two young doves."

"Were they, though!" said Mr. Toots, with a considerably lengthened face.

"They were made for one another," said the captain mournfully; "but what signifies that now?"

"Upon my word and honour," cried Mr. Toots, blurring out his words through a singular combination of awkward chuckles and emotion, "I'm even more sorry than I was before. You know, Captain Gills, I—I positively adore Miss Dombey;—I—I am perfectly sore with loving her;" the burst with which this confession forced itself out of the unhappy Mr. Toots bespoke the vehemence of his feelings; "but what would be the good of my regarding her in this manner, if I wasn't truly sorry for her feeling pain, whatever was the cause of it? Mine an't a selfish affection, you know," said Mr. Toots, in the confidence engendered by his having been a witness of the captain's tenderness. "It's the sort of thing with me, Captain Gills, that if I could be run over or—or trampled upon—or—or thrown off a very high place—or anything of that sort—for Miss Dombey's sake, it would be the most delightful thing that could happen to me."

All this Mr. Toots said in a suppressed voice, to prevent its reaching the jealous ears of the Chicken, who objected to the softer emotions; which effort of restraint, coupled with the intensity of his feelings, made him red to the tips of his ears, and caused him to present such an affecting spectacle of disinterested love to the eyes of Captain Cuttle, that the good captain patted him consolingly on the back, and bade him cheer up.

"Thankee, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "it's kind of you, in the midst of your own troubles, to say so. I'm very much obliged to you. As I said before, I really want a friend, and should be glad to have your acquaintance. Although I am very well off," said Mr. Toots

with energy, "you can't think what a miserable beast I am. The hollow crowd, you know, when they see me with the Chicken, and characters of distinction like that, suppose me to be happy; but I'm wretched. I suffer for Miss Dombey, Captain Gills. I can't get through my meals; I have no pleasure in my tailor; I often cry when I'm alone. I assure you it'll be a satisfaction to me to come back to-morrow, or to come back fifty times."

Mr. Toots, with these words, shook the captain's hand; and disguising such traces of his agitation as could be disguised on so short a notice before the Chicken's penetrating glance, rejoined that eminent gentleman in the shop. The Chicken, who was apt to be jealous of his ascendancy, eyed Captain Cuttle with anything but favour as he took leave of Mr. Toots; but followed his patron without being otherwise demonstrative of his ill-will: leaving the captain oppressed with sorrow; and Rob the Grinder elevated with joy, on account of having had the honour of staring for nearly half an hour at the conqueror of the Nobby Shropshire One.

Long after Rob was fast asleep in his bed under the counter, the captain sat looking at the fire; and long after there was no fire to look at, the captain sat gazing on the rusty bars, with unavailing thoughts of Walter and old Sol crowding through his mind. Retirement to the stormy chamber at the top of the house brought no rest with it; and the captain rose up in the morning sorrowful and unrefreshed.

As soon as the City offices were open, the captain issued forth to the counting-house of Dombey and Son. But there was no opening of the Midshipman's windows that morning. Rob the Grinder, by the captain's orders, left the shutters closed, and the house was as a house of death.

It chanced that Mr. Carker was entering the office as Captain Cuttle arrived at the door. Receiving the manager's benison gravely and silently, Captain Cuttle made bold to accompany him into his own room.

"Well, Captain Cuttle," said Mr. Carker, taking up his usual position before the fire-place, and keeping on his hat, "this is a bad business."

"You have received the news as was in print yesterday, sir?" said the captain.

"Yes," said Mr. Carker, "we have received it. It was accurately stated. The underwriters suffer a considerable loss. We are very sorry. No help! Such is life!"

Mr. Carker pared his nails delicately with a penknife, and smiled at the captain, who was standing by the door looking at him.

"I excessively regret poor Gay," said Carker, "and the crew. I understand there were some of our very best men among 'em. It always happens so. Many men with families too. A comfort to reflect that poor Gay had no family, Captain Cuttle!"

The captain stood rubbing his chin, and looking at the manager. The manager glanced at the unopened letters lying on his desk, and took up the newspaper.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Captain Cuttle?" he asked, looking off it, with a smiling and expressive glance at the door.

"I wish you could set my mind at rest, sir, on something it's uneasy about," returned the captain.

"Ay!" exclaimed the manager, "what's that? Come, Captain Cuttle, I must trouble you to be quick, if you please. I am much engaged."

"Lookee here, sir," said the captain, advancing a step. "Afore my friend Wal'r went on this here disastrous voyage——"

Come, come, Captain Cuttle," interposed the smiling manager, "don't talk about disastrous voyages in that way. We have nothing to do with disastrous voyages here, my good fellow. You must have begun very early on your day's allowance, captain, if you don't remember that there are hazards in all voyages, whether by sea or land. You are not made uneasy by the supposition that young what's-his-name was lost in bad weather that was got up against him in these offices—are you? Fie, captain! Sleep, and soda water, are the best cures for such uneasiness as that."

"My lad," returned the captain slowly,— "you are a'most a lad to me, and so I don't ask your pardon for that slip of a word,—if you find any pleasure in this here sport, you an't the gentleman I took you for, and if you an't the gentleman I took you for, maybe my mind has call to be uneasy. Now this is what it is, Mr. Carker.—Afore that poor lad went away, according to orders, he told me that he warn't a-going away for his own good or for promotion, he knowed. It was my belief that he was wrong, and I told him so, and I come here, your head governor being absent, to ask a question or two of you in a civil way, for my own satisfaction. Them questions you answered—frec. Now, it'll ease my mind to know, when all is over, as it is, and when what can't be cured must be endoored—for which, as a scholar, you'll overhaul the book's in, and thereof make a note—to know once more, in a word, that I warn't mistaken; that I warn't back'ard in my duty when I didn't tell the old man what Wal'r told me; and that

the wind was truly in his sail when he h'isted of it for Barbadoes Harbour. Mr. Carker," said the captain in the goodness of his nature; "when I was here last, we was very pleasant together. If I an't been altogether so pleasant myself this morning, on account of this poor lad, and if I have chafed again any observation of yours that I might have fended off, my name is Ed'ard Cuttle, and I ask your pardon."

"Captain Cuttle," returned the manager with all possible politeness, "I must ask you to do me a favour."

"And what is it, sir?" inquired the captain.

"To have the goodness to walk off, if you please," rejoined the manager, stretching forth his arm, "and to carry your jargon somewhere else."

Every knob in the captain's face turned white with astonishment and indignation; even the red rim on his forehead faded, like a rainbow among the gathering clouds.

"I tell you what, Captain Cuttle," said the manager, shaking his forefinger at him, and showing him all his teeth, but still amiably smiling, "I was much too lenient with you when you came here before. You belong to an artful and audacious set of people. In my desire to save young what's-his-name from being kicked out of this place, neck and crop, my good captain, I tolerated you; but for once, and only once. Now, go, my friend!"

The captain was absolutely rooted to the ground, and speechless.

"Go," said the good-humoured manager, gathering up his skirts, and standing astride upon the hearth-rug, "like a sensible fellow, and let us have no turning out, or any such violent measures. If Mr. Dombey were here, captain, you might be obliged to leave in a more ignominious manner, possibly. I merely say, go!"

The captain, laying his ponderous hand upon his chest, to assist himself in fetching a deep breath, looked at Mr. Carker from head to foot, and looked round the little room, as if he did not clearly understand where he was, or in what company.

"You are deep, Captain Cuttle," pursued Carker, with the easy and vivacious frankness of a man of the world who knew the world too well to be ruffled by any discovery of misdoing, when it did not immediately concern himself; "but you are not quite out of soundings, either—neither you nor your absent friend, captain. What have you done with your absent friend, hey?"

Again the captain laid his hand upon his chest. After drawing another deep breath, he

conjured himself to "stand by!" But in a whisper.

"You hatch nice little plots, and hold nice little councils, and make nice little appointments, and receive nice little visitors, too, captain, hey?" said Carker, bending his brows upon him, without showing his teeth any the less: "but it's a bold measure to come here afterwards. Not like your discretion! You conspirators, and hidlers, and runners-away should know better than that. Will you oblige me by going?"

"My lad," gasped the captain in a choked and trembling voice, and with a curious action going on in the ponderous fist; "there's a many words. I could wish to say to you, but I don't rightly know where they're stowed just at present. My young friend Wal'r was drowned only last night, according to my reckoning, and it puts me out, you see. But you and me will come alongside o' one another again, my lad," said the captain, holding up his hook, "if we live."

"It will be anything but shrewd in you, my good fellow, if we do," returned the manager with the same frankness; "for you may rely, I give you fair warning, upon my detecting and exposing you. I don't pretend to be a more moral man than my neighbours, my good captain; but the confidence of this House, or of any member of this House, is not to be abused and undermined while I have eyes and ears. Good day!" said Mr. Carker, nodding his head.

Captain Cuttle, looking at him steadily (Mr. Carker looked full as steadily at the captain), went out of the office, and left him standing astride before the fire, as calm and pleasant as if there were no more spots upon his soul than on his pure white linen, and his smooth sleek skin.

The captain glanced, in passing through the outer counting-house, at the desk where he knew poor Walter had been used to sit, now occupied by another young boy, with a face almost as fresh and hopeful as his on the day when they tapped the famous last bottle but one of the old madeira, in the little back-parlour. The association of ideas thus awakened did the captain a great deal of good; it softened him in the very height of his anger, and brought the tears into his eyes.

Arrived at the Wooden Midshipman's again, and sitting down in a corner of the dark shop, the captain's indignation, strong as it was, could make no head against his grief. Passion seemed not only to do wrong and violence to the memory of the dead, but to be infected by death,

and to droop and decline beside it. All the living knaves and liars in the world were nothing to the honesty and truth of one dead friend.

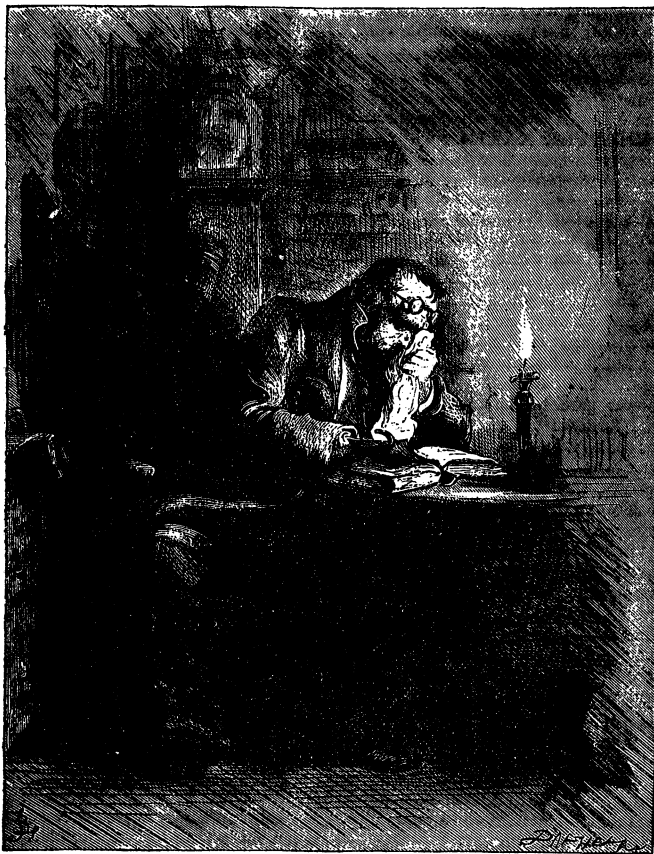
The only thing the honest captain made out clearly, in this state of mind, besides the loss of Walter, was, that with him almost the whole world of Captain Cuttle had been drowned. If he reproached himself sometimes, and keenly too, for having ever connived at Walter's innocent deceit, he thought at least as often of the Mr. Carker whom no sea could ever render up; and the Mr. Dombey, whom he now began to perceive was as far beyond human recall; and the "Heart's Delight," with whom he must never foregather again; and the Lovely Peg, that teak-built and trim ballad, that had gone ashore upon a rock, and split into mere planks and beams of rhyme. The captain sat in the dark shop, thinking of these things, to the entire exclusion of his own injury; and looking with as sad an eye upon the ground, as if in contemplation of their actual fragments as they floated past him.

But the captain was not unmindful, for all that, of such decent and respectful observances in memory of poor Walter as he felt within his power. Rousing himself and rousing Rob the Grinder (who in the unnatural twilight was fast asleep), the captain sallied forth with his attendant at his heels, and the door-key in his pocket, and repairing to one of those convenient slop-selling establishments of which there is abundant choice at the eastern end of London, purchased on the spot two suits of mourning—one for Rob the Grinder, which was immensely too small, and one for himself, which was immensely too large. He also provided Rob with a species of hat, greatly to be admired for its symmetry and usefulness, as well as for a happy blending of the mariner with the coalheaver; which is usually termed a sou'-wester; and which was something of a novelty in connection with the instrument business. In their several garments, which the vendor declared to be such a miracle in point of fit as nothing but a rare combination of fortuitous circumstances ever brought about, and the fashion of which was unparalleled within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, the captain and Grinder immediately arrayed themselves; presenting a spectacle fraught with wonder to all who beheld it.

In this altered form the captain received Mr. Toots. "I'm took aback, my lad, at present," said the captain, "and will only confirm that there ill news. Tell the young woman to break it gentle to the young lady, and for neither of 'em never to think of me no more—'special,

mind you, that is—though I will think of them, when night comes on a hurricane and seas is mountains rowling, for which overhaul your Doctor Watts, brother, and when found make a note on."

The captain reserved, until some fitter time, the consideration of Mr. Toots's offer of friendship, and thus dismissed him. Captain Cuttle's spirits were so low, in truth, that he half determined, that day, to take no further precau-



"AND READING SOFTLY TO HIMSELF, IN THE LITTLE BACK-PARLOUR, AND STOPPING NOW AND THEN TO WIPE HIS EYES, THE CAPTAIN, IN A TRUE AND SIMPLE SPIRIT, COMMITTED WALTER'S BODY TO THE DEEP."

tions against surprise from Mrs. MacStinger, but to abandon himself recklessly to chance, and be indifferent to what might happen. As evening came on, he fell into a better frame of mind, however; and spoke much of Walter to Rob the Grinder, whose attention and fidelity he likewise

incidentally commended. Rob did not blush to hear the captain earnest in his praises, but sat staring at him, and affecting to snivel with sympathy, and making a feint of being virtuous, and treasuring up every word he said (like a young spy as he was) with very promising deceit.

When Rob had turned in, and was fast asleep, the captain trimmed the candle, put on his spectacles—he had felt it appropriate to take to spectacles on entering into the Instrument Trade, though his eyes were like a hawk's—and opened the Prayer-book at the Burial Service. And reading softly to himself, in the little back-parlour, and stopping now and then to wipe his eyes, the captain, in a true and simple spirit, committed Walter's body to the deep.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONTRASTS.



URN we our eyes upon two homes; not lying side by side, but wide apart, though both within easy range and reach of the great city of London.

The first is situated in the green and wooded country near Norwood. It is not a mansion; it is of no pretensions as to size; but it is beautifully arranged, and tastefully kept. The lawn, the soft, smooth slope, the flower garden, the clumps of trees where graceful forms of ash and willow are not wanting, the conservatory, the rustic veranda with sweet-smelling creeping plants entwined about the pillars, the simple exterior of the house, the well-ordered offices, though all upon the diminutive scale proper to a mere cottage, bespeak an amount of elegant comfort within, that might serve for a palace. This indication is not without warrant; for, within it is a house of refinement and luxury. Rich colours, excellently blended, meet the eye at every turn; in the furniture—its proportions admirably devised to suit the shapes and sizes of the small rooms; on the walls; upon the floors; tinging and subduing the light that comes in through the odd glass doors and windows here and there. There are a few choice prints and pictures, too; in quaint nooks and recesses there is no want of books; and there are games of skill and chance set forth on tables—fantastic chess-men, dice, backgammon, cards, and billiards.

And yet, amidst this opulence of comfort, there is something in the general air that is not well. Is it that the carpets and the cushions are too soft and noiseless, so that those who move or repose among them seem to act by stealth? Is it that the prints and pictures do not commemorate great thoughts or deeds, or render nature in the poetry of landscape, hall, or hut, but are of one voluptuous cast—mere shows of

form and colour—and no more? Is it that the books have all their gold outside, and that the titles of the greater part qualify them to be companions of the prints and pictures? Is it that the completeness and the beauty of the place are here and there belied by an affectation of humility, in some unimportant and inexpensive regard, which is as false as the face of the too-truly-painted portrait hanging yonder, or its original at breakfast in his easy-chair below it? Or is it that, with the daily breath of that original and master of all here, there issues forth some subtle portion of himself, which gives a vague expression of himself to everything about him?

It is Mr. Carker the manager who sits in the easy-chair. A gaudy parrot in a burnished cage upon the table tears at the wires with her beak, and goes walking, upside down, in its dome-top, shaking her house and screeching; but Mr. Carker is indifferent to the bird, and looks with a musing smile at a picture on the opposite wall.

"A most extraordinary accidental likeness, certainly," says he.

Perhaps it is a Juno: perhaps a Potiphar's wife; perhaps some scornful nymph—according as the Picture-dealers found the market when they christened it. It is the figure of a woman, supremely handsome, who, turning away, but with her face addressed to the spectator, flashes her proud glance upon him.

It is like Edith.

With a passing gesture of his hand at the picture—what! a menace? No; yet something like it. A wave as of triumph? No; yet more like that. An insolent salute wafted from his lips? No; yet like that too—he resumes his breakfast, and calls to the chafing and imprisoned bird, who, coming down into a pendent gilded hoop within the cage, like a great wedding-ring, swings in it, for his delight.

The second home is on the other side of London, near to where the busy great north road of bygone days is silent and almost deserted, except by wayfarers who toil along on foot. It is a poor, small house, barely and sparsely furnished, but very clean; and there is even an attempt to decorate it, shown in the homely flowers trained about the porch and in the narrow garden. The neighbourhood in which it stands has as little of the country to recommend it as it has of the town. It is neither of the town nor country. The former, like the giant in his travelling boots, has made a stride and passed it, and has set his brick-and-mortar heel a long way in advance; but the intermediate space between the giant's feet,

as yet, is only blighted country, and not town; and here, among a few tall chimneys belching smoke all day and night, and among the brick-fields and the lanes where turf is cut, and where the fences tumble down, and where the dusty nettles grow, and where a scrap or two of hedge may yet be seen, and where the bird-catcher still comes occasionally, though he swears every time to come no more, this second home is to be found.

She who inhabits it is she who left the first in her devotion to an outcast brother. She withdrew from that home its redeeming spirit, and from its master's breast his solitary angel: but though his liking for her is gone, after this ungrateful slight as he considers it; and though he abandons her altogether in return, an old idea of her is not quite forgotten even by him. Let her flower garden, in which he never sets his foot, but which is yet maintained, among all his costly alterations, as if she had quitted it but yesterday, bear witness.

Harriet Carker has changed since then, and on her beauty there has fallen a heavier shade than Time of his unassisted self can cast, all-potent as he is—the shadow of anxiety and sorrow, and the daily struggle of a poor existence. But it is beauty still: and still a gentle, quiet, and retiring beauty that must be sought out, for it cannot vaunt itself; if it could, it would be what it is no more.

Yes. This slight, small, patient figure, neatly dressed in homely stuffs, and indicating nothing but the dull, household virtues, that have so little in common with the received idea of heroism, and greatness, unless, indeed, any ray of them should shine through the lives of the great ones of the earth, when it becomes a constellation, and is tracked in Heaven straightway—this slight, small, patient figure, leaning on the man still young, but worn and grey, is she, his sister, who, of all the world, went over to him in his shame, and put her hand in his, and with a sweet composure and determination, led him hopefully upon his barren way.

"It is early, John," she said. "Why do you go so early?"

"Not many minutes earlier than usual, Harriet. If I have the time to spare, I should like, I think—it's a fancy—to walk once by the house where I took leave of him."

"I wish I had ever seen or known him, John."

"It is better as it is, my dear, remembering his fate."

"But I could not regret it more, though I had known him. Is not your sorrow mine? And if I had, perhaps you would feel that I was a

better companion to you in speaking about him than I may seem now."

"My dearest sister! Is there anything within the range of rejoicing or regret, in which I am not sure of your companionship?"

"I hope you think not, John, for surely there is nothing!"

"How could you be better to me, or nearer to me then, than you are in this or anything?" said her brother. "I feel that you did know him, Harriet, and that you shared my feelings towards him."

She drew the hand which had been resting on his shoulder round his neck, and answered with some hesitation:

"No, not quite."

"True, true," he said; "you think I might have done him no harm if I had allowed myself to know him better?"

"Think! I know it."

"Designedly, Heaven knows I would not," he replied, shaking his head mournfully: "but his reputation was too precious to be perilled by such association. Whether you share that knowledge, or do not, my dear——"

"I do not," she said quietly.

"It is still the truth, Harriet, and my mind is lighter when I think of him for that which made it so much heavier then." He checked himself in his tone of melancholy, and smiled upon her as he said "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dear John! In the evening, at the old time and place, I shall meet you as usual on your way home. Good-bye."

The cordial face she lifted up to his to kiss him was his home, his life, his universe, and yet it was a portion of his punishment and grief; for in the cloud he saw upon it—though serene and calm as any radiant cloud at sunset—and in the constancy and devotion of her life, and in the sacrifice she had made of ease, enjoyment, and hope, he saw the bitter fruits of his old crime, for ever ripe and fresh.

She stood at the door looking after him, with her hands loosely clasped in each other, as he made his way over the frouzy and uneven patch of ground which lay before their house, which had once (and not long ago) been a pleasant meadow, and was now a very waste, with a disorderly crop of beginnings of mean houses rising out of the rubbish, as if they had been unskillfully sown there. Whenever he looked back—as once or twice he did—her cordial face shone like a light upon his heart; but when he plodded on his way, and saw her not, the tears were in her eyes as she stood watching him.

Her pensive form was not long idle at the

door. There was daily duty to discharge, and daily work to do—for such commonplace spirits, that are not heroic, often work hard with their hands—and Harriet was soon busy with her household tasks. These discharged, and the poor house made quite neat and orderly, she counted her little stock of money with an anxious face, and went out thoughtfully to buy some necessities for their table, planning and contriving, as she went, how to save. So sordid are the lives of such low natures, who are not only not heroic to their valets and waiting-women, but have neither valets nor waiting-women to be heroic to withal!

While she was absent, and there was no one in the house, there approached it, by a different way from that the brother had taken, a gentleman, a very little past his prime of life, perhaps, but of a healthy, florid hue, an upright presence, and a bright clear aspect, that was gracious and good-humoured. His eyebrows were still black, and so was much of his hair; the sprinkling of grey observable among the latter graced the former very much, and showed his broad frank brow and honest eyes to great advantage.

After knocking once at the door, and obtaining no response, this gentleman sat down on a bench in the little porch to wait. A certain skilful action of his fingers as he hummed some bars, and beat time on the seat beside him, seemed to denote the musician; and the extraordinary satisfaction he derived from humming something very slow and long, which had no recognisable tune, seemed to denote that he was a scientific one.

The gentleman was still twirling a theme, which seemed to go round and round and round, and in and in and in, and to involve itself like a cork-screw twirled upon a table, without getting any nearer to anything, when Harriet appeared returning. He rose up as she advanced, and stood with his head uncovered.

"You are come again, sir!" she said, faltering.

"I take that liberty," he answered. "May I ask for five minutes of your leisure?"

After a moment's hesitation, she opened the door, and gave him admission to the little parlour. The gentleman sat down there, drew his chair to the table over against her, and said, in a voice that perfectly corresponded to his appearance, and with a simplicity that was very engaging:

"Miss Harriet, you cannot be proud. You signified to me, when I called to other morning, that you were. Pardon me, if I say that I looked into your face while you spoke, and that it contradicted you. I look into it again," he

added, laying his hand gently on her arm for an instant, "and it contradicts you more and more."

She was somewhat confused and agitated, and could make no ready answer.

"It is the mirror of truth," said her visitor, "and gentleness. Excuse my trusting to it, and returning."

His manner of saying these words divested them entirely of the character of compliments. It was so plain, grave, unaffected, and sincere, that she bent her head, as if at once to thank him and acknowledge his sincerity.

"The disparity between our ages," said the gentleman, "and the plainness of my purpose, empower me, I am glad to think, to speak my mind. That is my mind; and so you see me for the second time."

"There is a kind of pride, sir," she returned after a moment's silence, "or what may be supposed to be pride, which is mere duty. I hope I cherish no other."

"For yourself?" he said.

"For myself."

"But—pardon me——" suggested the gentleman. "For your brother John?"

"Proud of his love I am," said Harriet, looking full upon her visitor, and changing her manner on the instant—not that it was less composed and quiet, but that there was a deep impassioned earnestness in it that made the very tremble in her voice a part of her firmness, "and proud of him. Sir, you who strangely know the story of his life, and repeated it to me when you were here last——"

"Merely to make my way into your confidence," interposed the gentleman. "For Heaven's sake, don't suppose——"

"I am sure," she said, "you revived it in my hearing, with a kind and good purpose. I am quite sure of it."

"I thank you," returned her visitor, pressing her hand hastily. "I am much obliged to you. You do me justice, I assure you. You were going to say that I, who know the story of John Carker's life——"

"May think it pride in me," she continued, "when I say that I am proud of him? I am. You know the time was when I was not—when I could not be—but that is past. The humility of many years, the uncomplaining expiation, the true repentance, the terrible regret, the pain I know he has even in my affection, which he thinks has cost me dear, though Heaven knows I am happy, but for his sorrow!—oh, sir, after what I have seen, let me conjure you, if you are in any place of power, and are ever wronged,

never, for any wrong, inflict a punishment that cannot be recalled; while there is a God above us to work changes in the hearts He made."

"Your brother is an altered man," returned the gentleman compassionately. "I assure you, I don't doubt it."

"He was an altered man when he did wrong," said Harriet. "He is an altered man again, and is his true self now, believe me, sir."

"But we go on," said her visitor, rubbing his forehead, in an absent manner, with his hand, and then drumming thoughtfully on the table,



"A CERTAIN SKILFUL ACTION OF HIS FINGERS AS HE HUMMED SOME BARS, AND BEAT TIME ON THE SEAT BESIDE HIM, SEEMED TO DENOTE THE MUSICIAN."

"we go on in our clockwork routine, from day to day, and can't make out, or follow, these changes. They—they're a metaphysical sort of thing. We—we haven't leisure for it. We—we haven't courage. They're not taught at schools

or colleges, and we don't know how to set about it. In short, we are so d—d business-like," said the gentleman, walking to the window and back, and sitting down again, in a state of extreme dissatisfaction and vexation.

"I am sure," said the gentleman, rubbing his forehead again, and drumming on the table as before; "I have good reason to believe that a jog-trot life, the same from day to day, would reconcile one to anything. One don't see anything, one don't hear anything, one don't know anything: that's the fact. We go on taking everything for granted, and so we go on, until whatever we do, good, bad, or indifferent, we do from habit. Habit is all I shall have to report, when I am called upon to plead to my conscience on my death-bed. 'Habit,' says I; 'I was deaf, dumb, blind, and paralytic to a million things, from habit.' 'Very business-like indeed, Mr. What's-your-name,' says Conscience, 'but it won't do here!'"

The gentleman got up and walked to the window again and back: seriously uneasy, though giving his uneasiness this peculiar expression.

"Miss Harriet," he said, resuming his chair, "I wish you would let me serve you. Look at me; I ought to look honest, for I know I am so at present. Do I?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile.

"I believe every word you have said," he returned. "I am full of self-reproach that I might have known this and seen this, and known you and seen you, any time these dozen years, and that I never have. I hardly know how I ever got here—creature, that I am, not only of my own habit, but of other people's! But, having done so, let me do something. I ask it in all honour and respect. You inspire me with both, in the highest degree. Let me do something."

"We are contented, sir."

"No, no, not quite," returned the gentleman. "I think not quite. There are some little comforts that might smooth your life, and his. And his!" he repeated, fancying that had made some impression on her. "I have been in the habit of thinking that there was nothing wanting to be done for him; that it was all settled and over; in short, of not thinking at all about it. I am different now. Let me do something for him. You too," said the visitor with careful delicacy, "have need to watch your health closely, for his sake, and I fear it fails."

"Whoever you may be, sir," answered Harriet, raising her eyes to his face, "I am deeply grateful to you. I feel certain that, in all you say, you have no object in the world but kindness to us. But years have passed since we began this life; and to take from my brother any part of what has so endeared him to me, and so proved his better resolution—any fragment of the merit of his unassisted, obscure, and forgotten repara-

tion—would be to diminish the comfort it will be to him and me, when that time comes to each of us, of which you spoke just now. I thank you better with these tears than any words. Believe it, pray."

The gentleman was moved, and put the hand she held out to his lips, much as a tender father might kiss the hand of a dutiful child. But more reverently.

"If the day should ever come," said Harriet, "when he is restored, in part, to the position he lost——"

"Restored!" cried the gentleman quickly. "How can that be hoped for? In whose hands does the power of any restoration lie? It is no mistake of mine, surely, to suppose that his having gained the priceless blessing of his life is one cause of the animosity shown to him by his brother."

"You touch upon a subject that is never breathed between us: not even between us," said Harriet.

"I beg your forgiveness," said the visitor. "I should have known it. I entreat you to forget that I have done so inadvertently. And now, as I dare urge no more—as I am not sure that I have a right to do so—though Heaven knows even that doubt may be habit," said the gentleman, rubbing his head, as despondently as before, "let me; though a stranger, yet no stranger; ask two favours."

"What are they?" she inquired.

"The first, that if you should see cause to change your resolution, you will suffer me to be as your right hand. My name shall then be at your service; it is useless now, and always insignificant."

"Our choice of friends," she answered, smiling faintly, "is not so great that I need any time for consideration. I can promise that."

"The second, that you will allow me sometimes, say every Monday morning, at nine o'clock—habit again—I must be business-like," said the gentleman, with a whimsical inclination to quarrel with himself on that head, "in walking past, to see you at the door or window. I don't ask to come in, as your brother will be gone out at that hour. I don't ask to speak to you. I merely ask to see, for the satisfaction of my own mind, that you are well, and without intrusion to remind you, by the sight of me, that you have a friend—an elderly friend, grey-haired already, and fast growing greyer—whom you may ever command."

The cordial face looked up in his; confided in it; and promised.

"I understand, as before," said the gentleman,

rising, "that you purpose not to mention my visit to John Carker, lest he should be at all distressed by my acquaintance with his history. I am glad of it, for it is out of the ordinary course of things, and—*habitu* again!" said the gentleman, checking himself impatiently, "as if there were no better course than the ordinary course!"

With that he turned to go, and walking, bareheaded, to the outside of the little porch, took leave of her with such a happy mixture of unconstrained respect and unaffected interest as no breeding could have taught, no truth mistrusted, and nothing but a pure and single heart expressed.

Many half-forgotten emotions were awakened in the sister's mind by this visit. It was so very long since any other visitor had crossed their threshold; it was so very long since any voice of sympathy had made sad music in her ears; that the stranger's figure remained present to her hours afterwards, when she sat at the window, plying her needle; and his words seemed newly spoken, again and again. He had touched the spring that opened her whole life; and if she lost him for a short space, it was only among the many shapes of the one great recollection of which that life was made.

Musing and working by turns; now constraining herself to be steady at her needle for a long time together, and now letting her work fall, unregarded, on her lap; and: straying wheresoever her busier thoughts led, Harriet Carker found the hours glide, by her, and the day steal on. The morning, which had been bright and clear, gradually became overcast; a sharp wind set in; the rain fell heavily; and a dark mist, drooping over the distant town, hid it from the view.

She often looked with compassion, at such a time, upon the stragglers who came wandering into London by the great highway hard by, and who, footsore and weary, and gazing fearfully at the huge town before them, as if foreboding that their misery there would be but as a drop of water in the sea, or as a grain of sea-sand on the shore, went shrinking on, cowering before the angry weather, and looking as if the very elements rejected them. Day after day, such travellers crept past, but always, as she thought, in one direction—always towards the town. Swallowed up in one phase or other of its immensity, towards which they seemed impelled by a desperate fascination, they never returned. Food for the hospitals, the churchyards, the prisons, the river, fever, madness, vice, and death,—they passed on to the monster, roaring in the distance, and were lost.

The chill wind was howling, and the rain was falling, and the day was darkening moodily, when Harriet, raising her eyes from the work on which she had long since been engaged with unremitting constancy, saw one of these travellers approaching.

A woman. A solitary woman of some thirty years of age; tall; well formed; handsome; miserably dressed; the soil of many country roads in varied weather—dust, chalk, clay, gravel—clotted on her grey cloak by the streaming wet; no bonnet on her head, nothing to defend her rich black hair from the rain but a torn handkerchief; with the fluttering ends of which, and with her hair, the wind blinded her so that she often stopped to push them back, and look upon the way she was going.

She was in the act of doing so when Harriet observed her. As her hands, parting on her sunburnt forehead, swept across her face, and threw aside the hindrances that encroached upon it, there was a reckless and regardless beauty in it: a dauntless and depraved indifference to more than weather: a carelessness of what was cast upon her bare head from heaven or earth: that, coupled with her misery and loneliness, touched the heart of her fellow-woman. She thought of all that was perverted and debased within her, no less than without: of modest graces of the mind, hardened and steeled, like these attractions of the person; of the many gifts of the Creator flung to the winds like the wild hair; of all the beautiful ruin upon which the storm was beating and the night was coming.

Thinking of this, she did not turn away with a delicate indignation—too many of her own compassionate and tender sex too often do—but pitied her.

Her fallen sister came on, looking far before her, trying with her eager eyes to pierce the mist in which the city was enshrouded, and glancing, now and then, from side to side, with the bewildered and uncertain aspect of a stranger. Though her tread was bold and courageous, she was fatigued; and, after a moment of irresolution, sat down upon a heap of stones; seeking no shelter from the rain, but letting it rain on her as it would.

She was now opposite the house. Raising her head after resting it for a moment on both hands, her eyes met those of Harriet.

In a moment Harriet was at the door; and the other, rising from her seat at her beck, came slowly, and with no conciliatory look, towards her.

"Why do you rest in the rain?" said Harriet gently.

"Because I have no other resting-place," was the reply.

"But there are many places of shelter near here. This," referring to the little porch, "is better than where you were. You are very welcome to rest here."

The wanderer looked at her, in doubt and surprise, but without any expression of thankfulness; and sitting down, and taking off one of her worn shoes to beat out the fragments of stone and dust that were inside, showed that her foot was cut and bleeding.

Harriet uttering an expression of pity, the traveller looked up with a contemptuous and incredulous smile.

"Why, what's a torn foot to such as me?" she said. "And what's a torn foot, in such as me, to such as you?"

"Come in and wash it," answered Harriet mildly, "and let me give you something to bind it up."

The woman caught her arm, and drawing it before her own eyes, hid them against it, and wept. Not like a woman, but like a stern man surprised into that weakness; with a violent heaving of her breast, and struggle for recovery, that showed how unusual the emotion was with her.

She submitted to be led into the house, and, evidently more in gratitude than in any care for herself, washed and bound the injured place. Harriet then put before her fragments of her own frugal dinner, and when she had eaten of them, though sparingly, besought her, before resuming her road (which she showed her anxiety to do), to dry her clothes before the fire. Again, more in gratitude than with any evidence of concern in her own behalf, she sat down in front of it, and unbinding the handkerchief about her head, and letting her thick wet hair fall down below her waist, sat drying it with the palms of her hands, and looking at the blaze.

"I dare say you are thinking," she said, lifting her head suddenly, "that I used to be handsome once. I believe I was—I know I was. Look here!"

She held up her hair roughly, with both hands, seizing it as if she would have torn it out; then, threw it down again, and flung it back as though it were a heap of serpents.

"Are you a stranger in this place?" asked Harriet.

"A stranger!" she returned, stopping between each short reply, and looking at the fire. "Yes. Ten or a dozen years a stranger. I have had no almanac where I have been. Ten or a dozen years. I don't know this part. It's much altered since I went away."

"Have you been far?"

"Very far. Months upon months over the sea, and far away even then. I have been where convicts go," she added, looking full upon her entertainer. "I have been one myself."

"Heaven help you and forgive you!" was the gentle answer.

"Ah! Heaven help me and forgive me!" she returned, nodding her head at the fire. "If man would help some of us a little more, God would forgive us all the sooner, perhaps."

But she was softened by the earnest manner and the cordial face so full of mildness and so free from judgment of her, and said, less hardly.

"We may be about the same age, you and I. If I am older, it is not above a year or two. Oh, think of that!"

She opened her arms, as though the exhibition of her outward form would show the moral wretch she was; and letting them drop at her sides, hung down her head.

"There is nothing we may not hope to repair; it is never too late to amend," said Harriet.

"You are penitent——"

"No," she answered. "I am not. I can't be. I am no such thing. Why should I be penitent, and all the world go free? They talk to me of my penitence. Who's penitent for the wrongs that have been done to me?"

She rose up, bound her handkerchief about her head, and turned to move away.

"Where are you going?" said Harriet.

"Yonder," she answered, pointing with her hand. "To London."

"Have you any home to go to?"

"I think I have a mother. She's as much a mother as her dwelling is a home," she answered with a bitter laugh.

"Take this," cried Harriet, putting money in her hand. "Try to do well. It is very little, but for one day it may keep you from harm."

"Are you married?" said the other faintly, as she took it.

"No. I live here with my brother. We have not much to spare, or I would give you more."

"Will you let me kiss you?"

Seeing no scorn or repugnance in her face, the object of her charity bent over her as she asked the question, and pressed her lips against her cheek. Once more she caught her arm, and covered her eyes with it; and then was gone.

Gone into the deepening night, and howling wind, and pelting rain; urging her way on towards the mist-enshrouded city, where the blurred lights gleamed; and with her black hair and disordered head-gear fluttering round her reckless face.

IAPTER XXXIV.

ANOTHER MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.



IN an ugly and dark room, an old woman, ugly and dark too, sat listening to the wind and rain, and crouching over a meagre fire. More constant to the last-named occupation than the first, she never changed her attitude, unless, when any stray drops of rain fell hissing on the smouldering embers, to raise her head with an awakened attention to the whistling and pattering outside, and gradually to let it fall again lower and lower and lower as she sunk into a brooding state of thought, in which the noises of the night were as indistinctly regarded as is the monotonous rolling of a sea by one who sits in contemplation on its shore.

There was no light in the room save that which the fire afforded. Glaring sullenly from time to time like the eye of a fierce beast half asleep, it revealed no objects that needed to be jealous of a better display. A heap of rags, a heap of bones, a wretched bed, two or three mutilated chairs or stools, the black walls and blacker ceiling, were all its winking brightness shone upon. As the old woman, with a gigantic and distorted image of herself, thrown half upon the wall behind her, half upon the roof above, sat bending over the few loose bricks within which it was pent, on the damp hearth of the chimney—for there was no stove—she looked as if she were watching at some witch's altar for a favourable token; and but that the movement of her chattering jaws and trembling chin was too frequent and too fast for the slow flickering of the fire, it would have seemed an illusion wrought by the light, as it came and went, upon a face as motionless as the form to which it belonged.

If Florence could have stood within the room, and looked upon the original of the shadow thrown upon the wall and roof, as it cowered thus over the fire, a glance might have sufficed to recall the figure of Good Mrs. Brown; notwithstanding that her childish recollection of that terrible old woman was as grotesque and exaggerated a presentment of the truth, perhaps, as the shadow on the wall. But Florence was not there to look on; and Good Mrs. Brown remained unrecognised, and sat staring at her fire, unobserved.

Attracted by a louder sputtering than usual, as the rain came hissing down the chimney in a little stream, the old woman raised her head im-

patiently, to listen afresh. And this time she did not drop it again; for there was a hand upon the door, and a footstep in the room.

"Who's that?" she said, looking over her shoulder.

"One who brings you news," was the answer in a woman's voice.

"News? Where from?"

"From abroad."

"From beyond seas?" cried the old woman, starting up.

"Ay, from beyond seas."

The old woman raked the fire together hurriedly, and going close to her visitor, who had entered and shut the door, and who now stood in the middle of the room, put her hand upon the drenched cloak, and turned the unresisting figure, so as to have it in the full light of the fire. She did not find what she had expected, whatever that might be; for she let the cloak go again, and uttered a querulous cry of disappointment and misery.

"What is the matter?" asked her visitor.

"Oho! Oho!" cried the old woman, turning her face upward, with a terrible howl.

"What is the matter?" asked the visitor again.

"It's not my gal!" cried the old woman, tossing up her arms, and clasping her hands above her head. "Where's my Alice? Where's my handsome daughter? They've been the death of her!"

"They've not been the death of her yet, if your name's Marwood," said the visitor.

"Have you seen my gal, then?" cried the old woman. "Has she wrote to me?"

"She said you couldn't read," returned the other.

"No more I can!" exclaimed the old woman, wringing her hands.

"Have you no light here?" said the other, looking round the room.

The old woman, mumbling and shaking her head, and muttering to herself about her handsome daughter, brought a candle from a cupboard in the corner, and thrusting it into the fire with a trembling hand, lighted it with some difficulty, and set it on the table. Its dirty wick burnt dimly at first, being choked in its own grease; and when the bleared eyes and failing sight of the old woman could distinguish anything by its light, her visitor was sitting with her arms folded, her eyes turned downwards, and a handkerchief she had worn upon her head lying on the table by her side.

"She sent to me by word of mouth, then, my gal, Alice?" mumbled the old woman after

waiting for some moments. "What did she say?"

"Look," returned the visitor.

The old woman repeated the word in a scared, uncertain way; and, shading her eyes, looked at the speaker, round the room, and at the speaker once again.

"Alice said, 'Look again, mother;'" and the speaker fixed her eyes upon her.

Again the old woman looked round the room, and at her visitor, and round the room once more. Hastily seizing the candle, and rising from her seat, she held it to the visitor's face, uttered a loud cry, set down the light, and fell upon her neck!

"It's my gal! It's my Alice! It's my handsome daughter, living and come back!" screamed the old woman, rocking herself to and fro upon the breast that coldly suffered her embrace. "It's my gal! It's my Alice! It's my handsome daughter living and come back!" she screamed again, dropping on the floor before her, clasping her knees, laying her head against them, and still rocking herself to and fro with every frantic demonstration of which her vitality was capable.

"Yes, mother," returned Alice, stooping forward for a moment, and kissing her, but endeavouring, even in the act, to disengage herself from her embrace. "I am here at last. Let go, mother; let go. Get up and sit in your chair. What good does this do?"

"She's come back harder than she went!" cried the mother, looking up in her face, and still holding to her knees. "She don't care for me! after all these years, and all the wretched life I've led!"

"Why, mother!" said Alice, shaking her ragged skirts to detach the old woman from them, "there are two sides to that. There have been years for me as well as you, and there has been wretchedness for me as well as you. Get up, get up!"

Her mother rose, and cried, and wrung her hands, and stood at a little distance gazing on her. Then she took the candle again, and going round her, surveyed her from head to foot, making a low moaning all the time. Then she put the candle down, resumed her chair, and beating her hands together to a kind of weary tune, and rolling herself from side to side, continued moaning and wailing to herself.

Alice got up, took off her wet cloak, and laid it aside. That done, she sat down as before, and with her arms folded, and her eyes gazing at the fire, remained silently listening with a contemptuous face to her old mother's inarticulate complainings.

"Did you expect to see me return as youthful as I went away, mother?" she said at length, turning her eyes upon the old woman. "Did you think a foreign life, like mine, was good for good looks? One would believe so to hear you!"

"It an't that!" cried the mother. "She knows it!"

"What is it, then?" returned the daughter. "It had best be something that don't last, mother, or my way out is easier than my way in."

"Hear that!" exclaimed the mother. "After all these years she threatens to desert me in the moment of her coming back again!"

"I tell you, mother, for the second time, there have been years for me as well as you," said Alice. "Come back harder? Of course I have come back harder. What else did you expect?"

"Harder to me! To her own dear mother!" cried the old woman.

"I don't know who began to harden me, if my own dear mother didn't," she returned, sitting with her folded arms, and knitted brows, and compressed lips, as if she were bent on excluding, by force, every softer feeling from her breast: "Listen, mother, to a word or two. If we understand each other now, we shall not fall out any more, perhaps. I went away a girl, and have come back a woman. I went away undutiful enough, and have come back no better, you may swear. But have you been very dutiful to me?"

"I!" cried the old woman. "To my own gal! A mother dutiful to her own child!"

"It sounds unnatural, don't it?" returned the daughter, looking coldly on her with her stern, regardless, hardy, beautiful face; "but I have thought of it sometimes, in the course of my lone years, till I have got used to it. I have heard some talk about duty, first and last; but it has always been of my duty to other people. I have wondered now and then—to pass away the time—whether no one ever owed any duty to me."

Her mother sat mowing, and mumbling, and shaking her head, but whether angrily, or remorsefully, or in denial, or only in her physical infirmity, did not appear.

"There was a child called Alice Marwood," said the daughter with a laugh, and looking down at herself in terrible derision of herself, "born among poverty and neglect, and nursed in it. Nobody taught her, nobody stepped forward to help her, nobody cared for her."

"Nobody!" echoed the mother, pointing to herself, and striking her breast.

"The only care she knew," returned the daughter, "was to be beaten, and stinted, and abused sometimes; and she might have done better without that. She lived in homes like this, and in the streets, with a crowd of little wretches like herself; and yet she brought good looks out of this childhood. So much the worse for her. She had better have been hunted and worried to death for ugliness."

"Go on! go on!" exclaimed the mother.

"I am going on," returned the daughter. "There was a girl called Alice Marwood. She was handsome. She was taught too late, and taught all wrong. She was too well cared for, too well trained, too well helped on, too much looked after. You were very fond of her—you were better off then. What came to that girl comes to thousands every year. It was only ruin, and she was born to it."

"After all these years!" whined the old woman. "My gal begins with this."

"She'll soon have ended," said the daughter. "There was a criminal called Alice Marwood—a girl still, but deserted and an outcast. And she was tried, and she was sentenced. And Lord, how the gentlemen in the court talked about it! and how grave the judge was on her duty, and on her having perverted the gifts of nature—as if he didn't know better than anybody there that they had been made curses to her!—and how he preached about the strong arm of the Law—so very strong to save her, when she was an innocent and helpless little wretch! and how solemn and religious it all was! I have thought of that many times since, to be sure!"

She folded her arms tightly on her breast, and laughed in a tone that made the howl of the old woman musical.

"So Alice Marwood was transported, mother," she pursued, "and was sent to learn her duty where there was twenty times less duty, and more wickedness, and wrong, and infamy, than here. And Alice Marwood is come back a woman. Such a woman as she ought to be, after all this. In good time there will be more solemnity, and more fine talk, and more strong arm, most likely, and there will be an end of her; but the gentlemen needn't be afraid of being thrown out of work. There's crowds of little wretches, boy and girl, growing up in any of the streets they live in, that'll keep them to it till they've made their fortunes."

The old woman leaned her elbows on the table, and resting her face upon her two hands, made a show of being in great distress—or really was perhaps.

"There! I have done, mother," said the daughter, with a motion of her head, as if in dismissal of the subject. "I have said enough. Don't let you and I talk of being dutiful, whatever we do. Your childhood was like mine, I suppose. So much the worse for both of us. I don't want to blame you, or to defend myself; why should I? That's all over, long ago. But I am a woman—not a girl now—and you and I needn't make a show of our history, like the gentlemen in the court. *We* know all about it well enough."

Lost and degraded as she was, there was a beauty in her, both of face and form, which, even in its worst expression, could not but be recognised as such by any one regarding her with the least attention. As she subsided into silence, and her face, which had been harshly agitated, quieted down; while her dark eyes, fixed upon the fire, exchanged the reckless light that had animated them, for one that was softened by something like sorrow; there shone through all her wayworn misery and fatigue a ray of the departed radiance of the fallen angel.

Her mother, after watching her for some time without speaking, ventured to steal her withered hand a little nearer to her across the table; and finding that she permitted this, to touch her face and smooth her hair. With the feeling, as it seemed, that the old woman was at least sincere in this show of interest, Alice made no movement to check her; so, advancing by degrees, she bound up her daughter's hair afresh, took off her wet shoes, if they deserved the name, spread something dry upon her shoulders, and hovered humbly about, muttering to herself, as she recognised her old features and expression more and more.

"You are very poor, mother, I see," said Alice, looking round, when she had sat thus for some time.

"Bitter poor, my deary," replied the old woman.

She admired her daughter, and was afraid of her. Perhaps her admiration, such as it was, had originated long ago, when she first found anything that was beautiful appearing in the midst of the squalid fight of her existence. Perhaps her fear was referable, in some sort, to the retrospect she had so lately heard. Be this as it might, she stood, submissively and deferentially, before her child, and inclined her head, as if in a pitiful entreaty to be spared any further reproach.

"How have you lived?"

"By begging, my deary."

"And pilfering, mother?"

"Sometimes, Ally—in a very small way. I am old and timid. I have taken trifles from children, now and then, my deary, but not often. I have tramped about the country, pet, and I know what I know. I have watched."

"Watched?" returned the daughter, looking at her.

"I have hung about a family, my deary," said the mother, even more humbly and submissively than before.



"SHE'S COME BACK HARDER THAN SHE WENT!" CRIED THE MOTHER, LOOKING UP IN HER FACE, AND STILL HOLDING TO HER KNEES.

"What family?"

"Hush, darling. Don't be angry with me; I did it for the love of you. In memory of my poor gal beyond seas." She put out her hand deprecatingly, and drawing it back again, laid it on her lips.

"Years ago, my deary," she pursued, glancing timidly at the attentive and stern face opposed to her, "I came across his little child by chance."

"Whose child?"

"Not his, Alice deary; don't look at me like

that; not his. How could it be his? 'You know he has none.'

"Whose, then?" returned the daughter. "You said his."

"Hush, Ally; you frighten me, deary. Mr. Dombey's—only Mr. Dombey's. Since then, darling, I have seen them often. I have seen him."

In uttering this last word, the old woman shrunk and recoiled, as if with a sudden fear that her daughter would strike her. But though the daughter's face was fixed upon her, and expressed the most vehement passion, she remained still: except that she clenched her arms tighter and tighter within each other, on her bosom, as if to restrain them by that means from doing an injury to herself, or some one else, in the blind fury of the wrath that suddenly possessed her.

"Little he thought who I was!" said the old woman, shaking her clenched hand.

"And little he cared!" muttered her daughter between her teeth.

"But there we were," said the old woman, "face to face. I spoke to him, and he spoke to me. I sat and watched him as he went away down a long grove of trees; and, at every step he took, I cursed him soul and body."

"He will thrive in spite of that," returned the daughter disdainfully.

"Ay, he is thriving," said the mother.

She held her peace; for the face and form before her were unshaped by rage. It seemed as if the bosom would burst with the emotions that strove within it. The effort that constrained and held it pent up was no less formidable than the rage itself: no less bespeaking the violent and dangerous character of the woman who made it. But it succeeded, and she asked, after a silence:

"Is he married?"

"No, deary," said the mother.

"Going to be?"

"Not that I know of, deary. But his master and friend is married. Oh, we may give him joy! We may give 'em all joy!" cried the old woman, hugging herself with her lean arms in her exultation. "Nothing but joy to us will come of that marriage. Mind me!"

The daughter looked at her for an explanation.

"But you are wet and tired: hungry and thirsty," said the old woman, hobbling to the cupboard: "and there's little here, and little"—diving down into her pocket, and jingling a few halfpence on the table—"little here. Have you any money, Alice deary?"

The covetous, sharp, eager face with which

she asked the question and looked on, as her daughter took out of her bosom the little gift she had so lately received, told almost as much of the history of this parent and child as the child herself had told in words.

"Is that all?" said the mother.

"I have no more. I should not have this, but for charity."

"But for charity, eh, deary?" said the old woman, bending greedily over the table to look at the money, which she appeared distrustful of her daughter's still retaining in her hand, and gazing on. "Humph! six and six is twelve, and six eighteen—so—we must make the most of it. I'll go buy something to eat and drink."

With greater alacrity than might have been expected in one of her appearance—for age and misery seemed to have made her as decrepit as ugly—she began to occupy her trembling hands in tying an old bonnet on her head, and folding a torn shawl about herself: still eyeing the money in her daughter's hand with the same sharp desire.

"What joy is to come to us of this marriage, mother?" asked the daughter. "You have not told me that."

"The joy," she replied, attiring herself with fumbling fingers, "of no love at all, and much pride and hate, my deary. The joy of confusion and strife among 'em, proud as they are, and of danger—danger, Alice!"

"What danger?"

"I have seen what I have seen. I know what I know!" chuckled the mother. "Let some look to it. Let some be upon their guard. My gal may keep good company yet!"

Then, seeing that, in the wondering earnestness with which her daughter regarded her, her hand involuntarily closed upon the money, the old woman made more speed to secure it, and hurriedly added, "But I'll go buy something, I'll go buy something."

As she stood with her hand stretched out before her daughter—her daughter, glancing again at the money, put it to her lips before parting with it.

"What, Ally! Do you kiss it?" chuckled the old woman. "That's like me—I often do. Oh, it's so good to us!" squeezing her own tarnished halfpence up to her bag of a throat, "so good to us in everything but not coming in heaps!"

"I kiss it, mother," said the daughter, "or I did then—I don't know that I ever did before—for the giver's sake."

"The giver, eh, deary?" retorted the old woman, whose dimmed eyes glistened as she

took it. "Ay! I'll kiss it for the giver's sake, too, when the giver can make it go farther. But I'll go spend it, deary. I'll be back directly."

"You seem to say you know a great deal, mother," said the daughter, following her to the door with her eyes. "You have grown very wise since we parted."

"Know!" croaked the old woman, coming back a step or two. "I know more than you think. I know more than *he* thinks, deary, as I'll tell you by-and-by. I know all about him."

The daughter smiled incredulously.

"I know of his brother, Alice," said the old woman, stretching out her neck with a leer of malice absolutely frightful, "who might have been where you have been—for stealing money—and who lives with his sister, over yonder, by the north road out of London."

"Where?"

"By the north road out of London, deary. You shall see the house, if you like. It ain't much to boast of, genteel as his own is. No, no, no," cried the old woman, shaking her head and laughing; for her daughter had started up, "not now; it's too far off; it's by the milestone, where the stones are heaped;—to-morrow, deary, if it's fine, and you are in the humour. But I'll go spend—"

"Stop!" and the daughter flung herself upon her, with her former passion raging like a fire. "The sister is a fair-faced devil, with brown hair?"

The old woman, amazed and terrified, nodded her head.

"I see the shadow of him in her face! It's a red house, standing by itself. Before the door there is a small green porch."

Again the old woman nodded.

"In which I sat to-day! Give me back the money."

"Alice! Deary!"

"Give me back the money, or you'll be hurt."

She forced it from the old woman's hand as she spoke, and, utterly indifferent to her complainings and entreaties, threw on the garments she had taken off, and hurried out with headlong speed.

The mother followed, limping after her as she could, and expostulating with no more effect upon her than upon the wind and rain and darkness that encompassed them. Obdurate and fierce in her own purpose, and indifferent to all besides, the daughter defied the weather and the distance, as if she had known no travel or fatigue, and made for the house where she had been relieved. After some quarter of an hour's walking, the old woman, spent and out of breath,

ventured to hold by her skirts; but she ventured no more, and they travelled on in silence through the wet and gloom. If the mother now and then uttered a word of complaint, she stifled it, lest her daughter should break away from her and leave her behind; and the daughter was dumb.

It was within an hour or so of midnight when they left the regular streets behind them, and entered on the deeper gloom of that neutral ground where the house was situated. The town lay in the distance, lurid and lowering; the bleak wind howled over the open space; all around was black, wild, desolate.

"This is a fit place for me!" said the daughter, stopping to look back. "I thought so, when I was here before, to-day."

"Alice, my deary," cried the mother, pulling her gently by the skirt, "Alice!"

"What now, mother?"

"Don't give the money back, my darling; please don't. We can't afford it. We want supper, deary. Money is money, whoever gives it. Say what you will, but keep the money."

"See there!" was all the daughter's answer.

"That is the house I mean. Is that it?"

The old woman nodded in the affirmative; and a few more paces brought them to the threshold. There was the light of fire and candle in the room where Alice had sat to dry her clothes; and, on her knocking at the door, John Carker appeared from that room.

He was surprised to see such visitors at such an hour, and asked Alice what she wanted.

"I want your sister," she said. "The woman who gave me money to-day."

At the sound of her raised voice Harriet came out.

"Oh!" said Alice. "You are here! Do you remember me?"

"Yes," she answered, wondering.

The face that had humbled itself before her looked on her now with such invincible hatred and defiance; and the hand that had gently touched her arm was clenched with such a show of evil purpose, as if it would gladly strangle her; that she drew close to her brother for protection.

"That I could speak with you, and not know you! That I could come near you, and not feel that blood was running in your veins, by the tingling of my own!" said Alice with a menacing gesture.

"What do you mean? What have I done?"

"Done!" returned the other. "You have sat me by your fire; you have given me food and money; you have bestowed your compassion on me! You! whose name I spit upon!"

The old woman, with a malevolence that made her ugliness quite awful, shook her withered hand at the brother and sister in confirmation of her daughter, but plucked her by the skirts again, nevertheless, imploring her to keep the money.

"If I dropped a tear upon your hand, may it wither it up! If I spoke a gentle word in your hearing, may it deafen you! If I touched you with my lips, may the touch be poison to you! A curse upon this roof that gave me shelter! Sorrow and shame upon your head! Ruin upon all belonging to you!"

As she said the words, she threw the money down upon the ground, and spurned it with her foot.

"I tread it in the dust: I wouldn't take it if it paved my way to Heaven! I wish the bleeding foot that brought me here to-day had rotted off, before it led me to your house!"

Harriet, pale and trembling, restrained her brother, and suffered her to go on uninterrupted.

"It was well that I should be pitied and forgiven by you, or any one of your name, in the first hour of my return! It was well that you should act the kind good lady to me! I'll thank you when I die; I'll pray for you, and all your race, you may be sure!"

With a fierce action of her hand, as if she sprinkled hatred on the ground, and with it devoted those who were standing there to destruction, she looked up once at the black sky, and strode out into the wild night.

The mother, who had plucked at her skirts again and again in vain, and had eyed the money lying on the threshold with an absorbing greed that seemed to concentrate her faculties upon it, would have prowled about until the house was dark, and then groped in the mire on the chance of repossessing herself of it. But the daughter drew her away, and they set forth straight, on their return to their dwelling; the old woman whimpering and bemoaning their loss upon the road, and fretfully bemoaning, as openly as she dared, the undutiful conduct of her handsome girl in depriving her of a supper on the very first night of their reunion.

Supperless to bed she went, saving for a few coarse fragments; and those she sat mumbling and munching over a scrap of fire, long after her undutiful daughter lay asleep.

Were this miserable mother, and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade of certain social vices sometimes prevailing higher up? In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they

lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting-place? Allowing for great difference of stuff and texture, was the pattern of this woof repeated among gentle blood at all?

Say, Edith Dombe! And Cleopatra, best of mothers, let us have your testimony!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HAPPY PAIR.



THE dark blot on the street is gone. Mr. Dombey's mansion, if it be a gap among the other houses any longer, is only so because it is not to be vied with in its brightness, and

haughtily casts them off. The saying is, that home is home, be it never so homely. If it hold good in the opposite contingency, and home is home, be it never so stately, what an altar to the Household Gods is raised up here!

Lights are sparkling in the windows this evening, and the ruddy glow of fires is warm and bright upon the hangings and soft carpets, and the dinner waits to be served, and the dinner-table is handsomely set forth, though only for four persons, and the sideboard is cumbrous with plate. It is the first time that the house has been arranged for occupation since its late changes, and the happy pair are looked for every minute.

Only second to the wedding morning, in the interest and expectation it engenders among the household, is this evening of the coming home. Mrs. Perch is in the kitchen taking tea; and has made the tour of the establishment, and priced the silks and damasks by the yard, and exhausted every interjection in the dictionary, and out of it, expressive of admiration and wonder. The upholsterer's foreman, who has left his hat, with a pocket-handkerchief in it, both smelling strongly of varnish, under a chair in the hall, lurks about the house, gazing upward at the cornices, and downward at the carpets, and occasionally, in a silent transport of enjoyment, taking a rule out of his pocket, and skirmishingly measuring expensive objects, with unutterable feelings. Cook is in high spirits, and says, Give *her* a place where there's plenty of company (as she'll bet you sixpence there will be now), for she is of a lively disposition, and she always was from a child, and she don't mind who knows it; which sentiment elicits from the

breast of Mrs. Perch a responsive murmur of support and approbation. All the housemaid hopes is, happiness for 'em—but marriage is a lottery, and the more she thinks about it, the more she feels the independence and the safety of a single life. Mr. Towlinson is saturnine and grim, and says that's his opinion too, and give him war besides, and down with the French—for this young man has a general impression that every foreigner is a Frenchman, and must be by the laws of nature.

At each new sound of wheels they all stop, whatever they are saying, and listen; and more than once there is a general starting up and a cry of "Here they are!" But here they are not yet; and cook begins to mourn over the dinner, which has been put back twice, and the upholsterer's foreman still goes lurking about the rooms, undisturbed in his blissful reverie.

Florence is ready to receive her father and her new mamma. Whether the emotions that are throbbing in her breast originate in pleasure or in pain she hardly knows. But the fluttering heart sends added colour to her cheeks, and brightness to her eyes; and they say down-stairs, drawing their heads together—for they always speak softly when they speak of her—how beautiful Miss Florence looks to-night, and what a sweet young lady she has grown, poor dear! A pause succeeds; and then cook, feeling, as president, that her sentiments are waited for, wonders whether—and there stops. The housemaid wonders too, and so does Mrs. Perch, who has the happy social faculty of always wondering when other people wonder, without being at all particular what she wonders at. Mr. Towlinson, who now desecrates an opportunity of bringing down the spirits of the ladies to his own level, says, Wait and see: he wishes some people were well out of this. Cook leads a sigh then, and a murmur of "Ah, it's a strange world,—it is indeed!" and, when it has gone round the table, adds persuasively, "But Miss Florence can't well be the worse for any change, Tom." Mr. Towlinson's rejoinder, pregnant with frightful meaning, is, "Oh, can't she, though!" and sensible that a mere man can scarcely be more prophetic, or improve upon that, he holds his peace.

Mrs. Skewton, prepared to greet her darling daughter and dear son-in-law with open arms, is appropriately attired for that purpose in a very youthful costume, with short sleeves. At present, however, her ripe charms are blooming in the shade of her own apartments, whence she has not emerged since she took possession of them a few hours ago, and where she is fast growing fretful, on account of the postponement

of dinner. The maid who ought to be a skeleton, but is in truth a buxom damsel, is, on the other hand, in a most amiable state; considering her quarterly stipend much safer than heretofore, and foreseeing a great improvement in her board and lodging.

Where are the happy pair for whom this brave home is waiting? Do steam, tide, wind, and horses all abate their speed, to linger on such happiness? Does the swarm of loves and graces hovering about them retard their progress by its numbers? Are there so many flowers in their happy path, that they can scarcely move along, without entanglement in thornless roses and sweetest brier?

They are here at last! The noise of wheels is heard, grows louder, and a carriage drives up to the door! A thundering knock from the obnoxious foreigner anticipates the rush of Mr. Towlinson and party to open it; and Mr. Dombey and his bride alight, and walk in arm-and-arm.

"My sweetest Edith!" cries an agitated voice upon the stairs. "My dearest Dombey!" and the short sleeves wreath themselves about the happy couple in turn, and embrace them.

Florence had come down to the hall too, but did not advance: reserving her timid welcome until these nearer and dearer transports should subside. But the eyes of Edith sought her out upon the threshold; and, dismissing her sensitive parent with a slight kiss on her cheek, she hurried on to Florence and embraced her.

"How do you do, Florence?" said Mr. Dombey, putting out his hand.

As Florence, trembling, raised it to her lips, she met his glance. The look was cold and distant enough, but it stirred her heart to think that she observed in it something more of interest than he had ever shown before. It even expressed a kind of faint surprise, and not a disagreeable surprise, at sight of her. She dared not raise her eyes to his any more; but she felt that he looked at her once again, and not less favourably. Oh! what a thrill of joy shot through her, awakened by even this intangible and baseless confirmation of her hope that she would learn to win him through her new and beautiful mamma!

"You will not be long dressing, Mrs. Dombey, I presume?" said Mr. Dombey.

"I shall be ready immediately."

"Let them send up dinner in a quarter of an hour."

With that Mr. Dombey stalked away to his own dressing-room, and Mrs. Dombey went upstairs to hers. Mrs. Skewton and Florence repaired to the drawing-room, where that excellent

mother considered it incumbent on her to shed a few irrepressible tears, supposed to be forced from her by her daughter's felicity; and which she was still drying, very gingerly, with a laced corner of her pocket-handkerchief, when her son-in-law appeared.

"And how, my dearest Dombey, did you find that delightfulest of cities, Paris?" she asked, subduing her emotion.

"It was cold," returned Mr. Dombey.

"Gay as ever," said Mrs. Skewton, "of course."

"Not particularly. I thought it dull," said Mr. Dombey.

"Fie, my dearest Dombey!" archly; "dull!"

"It made that impression upon me, madam," said Mr. Dombey with grave politeness. "I believe Mrs. Dombey found it dull too. She mentioned once or twice that she thought it so."

"Why, you naughty girl!" cried Mrs. Skewton, rallying her dear child, who now entered, "what dreadfully heretical things have you been saying about Paris?"

Edith raised her eyebrows with an air of weariness; and passing the folding doors, which were thrown open to display the suite of rooms in their new and handsome garniture, and barely glancing at them as she passed, sat down by Florence.

"My dear Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, "how charmingly these people have carried out every idea that we hinted! They have made a perfect palace of the house, positively."

"It is handsome," said Mr. Dombey, looking round. "I directed that no expense should be spared; and all that money could do has been done, I believe."

"And what can it not do, dear Dombey?" observed Cleopatra.

"It is powerful, madam," said Mr. Dombey.

He looked in his solemn way towards his wife, but not a word said she.

"I hope, Mrs. Dombey," addressing her, after a moment's silence, with especial distinctness, "that these alterations meet with your approval?"

"They are as handsome as they can be," she returned with haughty carelessness. "They should be so, of course. And I suppose they are."

An expression of scorn was habitual to the proud face, and seemed inseparable from it: but the contempt with which it received any appeal to admiration, respect, or consideration on the ground of his riches, no matter how slight or ordinary in itself, was a new and different expression, unequalled in history by any other

of which it was capable. Whether Mr. Dombey, wrapped in his own greatness, was at all aware of this, or no, there had not been wanting opportunities already for his complete enlightenment; and at that moment it might have been effected by the one glance of the dark eye that lighted on him, after it had rapidly and scornfully surveyed the theme of his self-glorification. He might have read in that one glance that nothing that his wealth could do, though it were increased ten thousand fold, could win him, for its own sake, one look of softened recognition from the defiant woman linked to him, but arrayed with her whole soul against him. He might have read in that one glance that even for its sordid and mercenary influence upon herself she spurned it, while she claimed its utmost power as her right, her bargain—as the base and worthless recompense for which she had become his wife. He might have read in it that, ever baring her own head for the lightning of her own contempt and pride to strike, the most innocent allusion to the power of his riches degraded her anew, sunk her deeper in her own respect, and made the blight and waste within her more complete.

But dinner was announced, and Mr. Dombey led down Cleopatra; Edith and his daughter following. Sweeping past the gold and silver demonstration on the sideboard as if it were heaped-up dirt, and deigning to bestow no look upon the elegancies around her, she took her place at his board for the first time, and sat, like a statue, at the feast.

Mr. Dombey, being a good deal in the statue way himself, was well enough pleased to see his handsome wife immovable and proud and cold. Her deportment being always elegant and graceful, this as a general behaviour was agreeable and congenial to him. Presiding, therefore, with his accustomed dignity, and not at all reflecting on his wife by any warmth or hilarity of his own, he performed his share of the honours of the table with a cool satisfaction; and the installation dinner, though not regarded downstairs as a great success, or very promising beginning, passed off, above, in a sufficiently polite, genteel, and frosty manner.

Soon after tea, Mrs. Skewton, who affected to be quite overcome and worn out by her emotions of happiness, arising in the contemplation of her dear child united to the man of her heart, but who there is reason to suppose, found this family party somewhat dull, as she yawned for one hour continually behind her fan, retired to bed. Edith, also, silently withdrew, and came back no more. Thus, it happened that Flo-

rence, who had been up-stairs to have some conversation with Diogenes, returning to the drawing-room with her little work-basket, found no one there but her father, who was walking to and fro in dreary magnificence.

"I beg your pardon. Shall I go away, papa?" said Florence faintly, hesitating at the door.

"No," returned Mr. Dombey, looking round over his shoulder; "you can come and go here, Florence, as you please. This is not my private room."

Florence entered, and sat down at a distant little table with her work; finding herself for the first time in her life—for the very first time within her memory from her infancy to that hour—alone with her father as his companion. She, his natural companion, his only child, who in her lonely life and grief had known the suffering of a breaking heart; who, in her rejected love, had never breathed his name to God at night, but with a tearful blessing, heavier on him than a curse; who had prayed to die young, so she might only die in his arms; who had, all through, repaid the agony of slight and coldness, and dislike, with patient unexact love, excusing him, and pleading for him, like his better angel!

She trembled, and her eyes were dim. His figure seemed to grow in height and bulk before her as he paced the room: now it was all blurred and indistinct; now clear again, and plain: and now she seemed to think that this had happened, just the same, a multitude of years ago. She yearned towards him, and yet shrunk from his approach. Unnatural emotion in a child, innocent of wrong! Unnatural the hand that had directed the sharp plough, which furrowed up her gentle nature for the sowing of its seeds!

Bent upon not distressing or offending him by her distress, Florence controlled herself, and sat quietly at her work. After a few more turns across and across the room, he left off pacing it; and withdrawing into a shadowy corner at some distance, where there was an easy-chair, covered his head with a handkerchief, and composed himself to sleep.

It was enough for Florence to sit there watching him; turning her eyes towards his chair from time to time; watching him with her thoughts, when her face was intent upon her work; and sorrowfully glad to think that he *could* sleep while she was there, and that he was not made restless by her strange and long-forbidden presence.

What would have been her thoughts if she had known that he was steadily regarding her; that the veil upon his face, by accident or by

design, was so adjusted that his sight was free, and that it never wandered from her face an instant! That when she looked towards him, in the obscure dark corner, her speaking eyes, more earnest and pathetic in their voiceless speech than all the orators of all the world, and impeaching him more nearly in their mute address, met his, and did not know it! That when she bent her head again over her work, he drew his breath more easily, but with the same attention looked upon her still—upon her white brow and her falling hair, and busy hands; and, once attracted, seemed to have no power to turn his eyes away!

And what were his thoughts meanwhile? With what emotions did he prolong the attentive gaze covertly directed on his unknown daughter? Was there reproach to him in the quiet figure and the mild eyes? Had he begun to feel her disregarded claims, and did they touch him home at last, and waken him to some sense of his cruel injustice?

There are yielding moments in the lives of the sternest and hardest men, though such men often keep their secret well. The sight of her in her beauty, almost changed into a woman without his knowledge, may have struck out some such moments even in his life of pride. Some passing thought that he had had a happy home within his reach—had had a household spirit bending at his feet—had overlooked it in his stiff-necked, sullen arrogance, and wandered away and lost himself—may have engendered them. Some simple eloquence distinctly heard, though only uttered in her eyes, unconscious that he read them, as, "By the death-beds I have tended, by the childhood I have suffered, by our meeting in this dreary house at midnight, by the cry wrung from me in the anguish of my heart, O father, turn to me and seek a refuge in my love before it is too late!" may have arrested them. Meaner and lower thoughts, as that his dead boy was now superseded by new ties, and he could forgive the having been supplanted in his affection, may have occasioned them. The mere association of her as an ornament, with all the ornament and pomp about him, may have been sufficient. But, as he looked, he softened to her more and more. As he looked, she became blended with the child he had loved, and he could hardly separate the two. As he looked, he saw her for an instant by a clearer and a brighter light, not bending over that child's pillow as his rival—monstrous thought!—but as the spirit of his home, and in the action tending himself, no less, as he sat once more with his bowed-down head upon his hand at the foot of

the little bed. He felt inclined to speak to her, and call her to him. The words "Florence, come here!" were rising to his lips—slowly and with difficulty, they were so very strange—when they were checked and stifled by a footstep on the stair.

It was his wife's. She had exchanged her dinner dress for a loose robe, and had unbound her hair, which fell freely about her neck. But this was not the change in her that startled him. "Florence dear," she said, "I have been looking for you everywhere."

As she sat down by the side of Florence, she stooped and kissed her hand. He hardly knew his wife. She was so changed. It was not merely that her smile was new to him—though that he had never seen; but her manner, the tone of her voice, the light of her eyes, the interest and confidence, and winning wish to please, expressed in all—this was not Edith.

"Softly, dear mamma. Papa is asleep."

It was Edith now. She looked towards the corner where he was, and he knew that face and manner very well.

"I scarcely thought you could be here, Florence."

Again, how altered and how softened in an instant!

"I left here early," pursued Edith, "purposely to sit up-stairs and talk with you. But, going to your room, I found my bird was flown, and I have been waiting there ever since, expecting its return."

If it had been a bird indeed, she could not have taken it more tenderly and gently to her breast than she did Florence.

"Come, dear!"

"Papa will not expect to find me, I suppose, when he wakes?" hesitated Florence.

"Do you think he will, Florence?" said Edith, looking full upon her.

Florence drooped her head, and rose, and put up her work-basket. Edith drew her hand through her arm, and they went out of the room like sisters. Her very step was different and new to him, Mr. Dombey thought, as his eyes followed her to the door.

He sat in his shadowy corner so long, that the church clocks struck the hour three times before he moved that night. All that while his face was still intent upon the spot where Florence had been seated. The room grew darker as the candles waned and went out; but a darkness gathered on his face, exceeding any that the night could cast, and rested there.

Florence and Edith, seated before the fire in the remote room where little Paul had died,

talked together for a long time. Diogenes, who was of the party, had at first objected to the admission of Edith, and, even in deference to his mistress's wish, had only permitted it under growling protest. But, emerging by little and little from the ante-room, whither he had retired in dudgeon, he soon appeared to comprehend that, with the most amiable intentions, he had made one of those mistakes which will occasionally arise in the best-regulated dogs' minds; as a friendly apology for which he stuck himself up on end between the two, in a very hot place in front of the fire, and sat panting at it, with his tongue out, and a most imbecile expression of countenance, listening to the conversation.

It turned, at first, on Florence's books and favourite pursuits, and on the manner in which she had beguiled the interval since the marriage. The last theme opened up to her a subject which lay very near her heart, and she said, with the tears starting to her eyes:

"Oh, mamma! I have had a great sorrow since that day."

"You a great sorrow, Florence!"

"Yes. Poor Walter is drowned."

Florence spread her hands before her face, and wept with all her heart. Many as were the secret tears which Walter's fate had cost her, they flowed yet when she thought or spoke of him.

"But tell me, dear," said Edith, soothing her, "who was Walter? What was he to you?"

"He was my brother, mamma. After dear Paul died, we said we would be brother and sister. I had known him a long time—from a little child. He knew Paul, who liked him very much; Paul said, almost at the last, 'Take care of Walter, dear papa! I was fond of him!' Walter had been brought in to see him, and was there then—in this room."

"And *did* he take care of Walter?" inquired Edith sternly.

"Papa? He appointed him to go abroad. He was drowned in shipwreck on his voyage," said Florence, sobbing.

"Does he know that he is dead?" asked Edith.

"I cannot tell, mamma. I have no means of knowing. Dear mamma!" cried Florence, clinging to her as for help, and hiding her face upon her bosom, "I know that you have seen——"

"Stay! Stop, Florence!" Edith turned so pale, and spoke so earnestly, that Florence did not need her restraining hand upon her lips: "Tell me all about Walter first; let me understand this history all through."

Florence related it, and everything belonging

to it, even down to the friendship of Mr. Toots, of whom she could hardly speak in her distress without a tearful smile, although she was deeply grateful to him. When she had concluded her account, to the whole of which Edith, holding her hand, listened with close attention, and when a silence had succeeded, Edith said:

"What is it that you know I have seen, Florence?"

"That I am not," said Florence, with the same mute appeal, and the same quick concealment of her face as before, "that I am not a favourite child, mamma. I never have been. I have never known how to be. I have missed the way, and had no one to show it to me. Oh, let me learn from you how to become dearer to papa! Teach me! you, who can so well!" and clinging closer to her, with some broken, fervent words of gratitude and endearment, Florence, relieved of her sad secret, wept long, but not as painfully as of yore, within the encircling arms of her new mother.

Pale, even to her lips, and with a face that strove for composure until its proud beauty was as fixed as death, Edith looked down upon the weeping girl, and once kissed her. Then, gradually disengaging herself, and putting Florence away, she said, stately and quiet as a marble image, and in a voice that deepened as she spoke, but had no other token of emotion in it:

"Florence, you do not know me! Heaven forbid that you should learn from me!"

"Not learn from you?" repeated Florence in surprise.

"That I should teach you how to love, or be loved, Heaven forbid!" said Edith. "If you could teach me, that were better; but it is too late. You are dear to me, Florence. I did not think that anything could ever be so dear to me as you are in this little time."

She saw that Florence would have spoken here, so checked her with her hand, and went on.

"I will be your true friend always. I will cherish you as much, if not as well, as any one in this world could. You may trust in me—I know it, and I say it, dear—with the whole confidence even of your pure heart. There are hosts of women whom he might have married, better and truer in all other respects than I am, Florence; but there is not one who could come here, his wife, whose heart could beat with greater truth to you than mine does."

"I know it, dear mamma!" cried Florence. "From that first most happy day I have known it."

"Most happy day!" Edith seemed to repeat the words involuntarily, and went on. "Though the merit is not mine, for I thought little of you

until I saw you, let the undeserved reward be mine in your trust and love. And in this—in this, Florence; on the first night of my taking up my abode here; I am led on, as it is best I should be, to say it for the first and last time."

Florence, without knowing why, felt almost afraid to hear her proceed, but kept her eyes riveted on the beautiful face so fixed upon her own.

"Never seek to find in me," said Edith, laying her hand upon her breast, "what is not here. Never if you can help it, Florence, fall off from me because it is *not* here. Little by little you will know me better, and the time will come when you will know me as I know myself. Then, be as lenient to me as you can, and do not turn to bitterness the only sweet remembrance I shall have."

The tears that were visible in her eyes, as she kept them fixed on Florence, showed that the composed face was but as a handsome mask; but she preserved it, and continued

"I *have* seen what you say, and know how true it is. But believe me—you will soon, if you cannot now—there is no one on this earth less qualified to set it right or help you, Florence, than I. Never ask me why, or speak to me about it, or of my husband more. There should be, so far, a division and a silence between us two, like the grave itself."

She sat for some time silent; Florence scarcely venturing to breathe meanwhile, as dim and imperfect shadows of the truth, and all its daily consequences, chased each other through her terrified, yet incredulous imagination. Almost as soon as she had ceased to speak, Edith's face began to subside from its set composure to that quieter and more relenting aspect which it usually wore when she and Florence were alone together. She shaded it, after this change, with her hands; and when she arose, and with an affectionate embrace bade Florence good night, went quickly, and without looking round.

But, when Florence was in bed, and the room was dark except for the glow of the fire, Edith returned, and saying that she could not sleep, and that her dressing-room was lonely, drew a chair upon the hearth, and watched the embers as they died away. Florence watched them too from her bed, until they, and the noble figure before them, crowned with its flowing hair, and in its thoughtful eyes reflecting back their light, became confused and indistinct, and finally were lost in slumber.

In her sleep, however, Florence could not lose an undefined impression of what had so recently passed. It formed the subject of her

dreams, and haunted her; now in one shape, now in another; but always oppressively; and with a sense of fear. She dreamed of seeking her father in wildernesses, of following his track up fearful heights, and down into deep mines and caverns; of being charged with something that would release him from extraordinary suffering—she knew not what, or why—yet never being able to attain the goal and set him free. Then she saw him dead, upon that very bed, and in that very room, and knew that he had never loved her to the last, and fell upon his cold breast, passionately weeping. Then a prospect opened, and a river flowed, and a plaintive voice she knew cried, "It is running on, Floy! It has never stopped! You are moving with it!" And she saw him at a distance stretching out his arms towards her, while a figure, such as Walter's used to be, stood near him, awfully serene and still. In every vision Edith came and went, sometimes to her joy, sometimes to her sorrow, until they were alone upon the brink of a dark grave, and Edith pointing down, she looked and saw—what?—another Edith lying at the bottom.

In the terror of this dream, she cried out, and awoke, she thought. A soft voice seemed to whisper in her ear, "Florence, dear Florence, it is nothing but a dream!" and, stretching out her arms, she returned the caress of her new mamma, who then went out at the door in the light of the grey morning. In a moment Florence sat up, wondering whether this had really taken place or not; but she was only certain that it was grey morning indeed, and that the blackened ashes of the fire were on the hearth, and that she was alone.

So passed the night on which the happy pair came home.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOUSE-WARMING.

MANY succeeding days passed in like manner; except that there were numerous visits received and paid, and that Mrs. Skewton held little levees in her own apartments, at which Major Bagstock was a frequent attendant, and that Florence encountered no second look from her father, although she saw him every day. Nor had she much communication in words with her new mamma, who was imperious and proud to all the house but her—Florence could not but observe that—and who, although she always

sent for her or went to her when she came home from visiting, and would always go into her room at night before retiring to rest, however late the hour, and never lost an opportunity of being with her, was often her silent and thoughtful companion for a long time together.

Florence, who had hoped for so much from this marriage, could not help sometimes comparing the bright house with the faded, dreary place out of which it had arisen, and wondering when, in any shape, it would begin to be a home; for that it was no home then for any one, though everything went on luxuriously and regularly, she had always a secret misgiving. Many an hour of sorrowful reflection by day and night, and many a tear of blighted hope, Florence bestowed upon the assurance her new mamma had given her so strongly, that there was no one on the earth more powerless than herself to teach her how to win her father's heart. And soon Florence began to think—resolved to think would be the truer phrase—that as no one knew so well how hopeless of being subdued or changed her father's coldness to her was, so she had given her this warning, and forbidden the subject in very compassion. Unselfish here, as in her every act and fancy, Florence preferred to bear the pain of this new wound, rather than encourage any faint foreshadowings of the truth as it concerned her father; tender of him, even in her wandering thoughts. As for his home, she hoped it would become a better one, when its state of novelty and transition should be over: and, for herself, thought little and lamented less.

If none of the new family were particularly at home in private, it was resolved that Mrs. Dombey at least should be at home in public without delay. A series of entertainments in celebration of the late nuptials, and in cultivation of society, were arranged chiefly by Mr. Dombey and Mrs. Skewton; and it was settled that the festive proceedings should commence by Mrs. Dombey's being at home upon a certain evening, and by Mr. and Mrs. Dombey's requesting the honour of the company of a great many incongruous people to dinner on the same day.

Accordingly, Mr. Dombey produced a list of sundry eastern magnates who were to be bidden to this feast on his behalf; to which Mrs. Skewton, acting for her dearest child, who was haughtily careless on the subject, subjoined a western list, comprising Cousin Fecnix, not yet returned to Baden-Baden, greatly to the detriment of his personal estate; and a variety of moths of various degrees and ages, who had, at various times, flattered round the light of her fair daughter or her

self without any lasting injury to their wings. Florence was enrolled as a member of the dinner-party by Edith's command—elicited by a moment's doubt and hesitation on the part of Mrs. Skewton; and Florence, with a wondering heart, and with a quick instinctive sense of everything that grated on her father in the least, took her silent share in the proceedings of the day.

The proceedings commenced by Mr. Dombey, in a cravat of extraordinary height and stiffness, walking restlessly about the drawing-room until the hour appointed for dinner; punctual to which, an East India Director, of immense wealth, in a waistcoat apparently constructed in serviceable deal by some plain carpenter, but really engendered in the tailor's art, and composed of the material called nankeen, arrived, and was received by Mr. Dombey alone. The next stage of the proceedings was Mr. Dombey sending his compliments to Mrs. Dombey, with a correct statement of the time; and the next, the East India Director's falling prostrate, in a conversational point of view, and, as Mr. Dombey was not the man to pick him up, staring at the fire until rescue appeared in the person of Mrs. Skewton; whom the Director, as a pleasant start in life for the evening, mistook for Mrs. Dombey, and greeted with enthusiasm.

The next arrival was a Bank Director, reputed to be able to buy up anything—human Nature generally, if he should take it in his head to influence the Money Market in that direction—but who was a wonderfully modest-spoken man, almost boastfully so, and mentioned his “little place” at Kingston-upon-Thames, and its just being barely equal to giving Dombey a bed and a chop, if he would come and visit it. Ladies, he said, it was not for a man who lived in his quiet way to take upon himself to invite—but if Mrs. Skewton and her daughter, Mrs. Dombey, should ever find themselves in that direction, and would do him the honour to look at a little bit of a shrubbery they would find there, and a poor little flower-bed or so, and a humble apology for a pinery, and two or three little attempts of that sort without any pretension, they would distinguish him very much. Carrying out his character, this gentleman was very plainly dressed, in a wisp of cambric for a neckcloth, big shoes, a coat that was too loose for him, and a pair of trousers that were too spare; and mention being made of the Opera by Mrs. Skewton, he said he very seldom went there, for he couldn't afford it. It seemed greatly to delight and exhilarate him to say so; and he beamed on his audience afterwards, with his hands in his pockets, and excessive satisfaction twinkling in his eyes.

Now Mrs. Dombey appeared, beautiful and proud, and as disdainful and defiant of them all as if the bridal wreath upon her head had been a garland of steel spikes put on to force concession from her which she would die sooner than yield. With her was Florence. When they entered together, the shadow of the night of the return again darkened Mr. Dombey's face. But unobserved: for Florence did not venture to raise her eyes to his, and Edith's indifference was too supreme to take the least heed of him.

The arrivals quickly became numerous. More Directors, Chairmen of public companies, elderly ladies carrying burdens on their heads for full dress, Cousin Feenix, Major Bagstock, friends of Mrs. Skewton, with the same bright bloom on their complexion, and very precious necklaces on very withered necks. Among these, a young lady of sixty-five, remarkably coolly dressed as to her back and shoulders, who spoke with an engaging lip, and whose eyelids wouldn't keep up well, without a great deal of trouble on her part, and whose manners had that indefinable charm which so frequently attaches to the giddiness of youth. As the greater part of Mr. Dombey's list were disposed to be taciturn, and the greater part of Mrs. Dombey's list were disposed to be talkative, and there was no sympathy between them, Mrs. Dombey's list, by magnetic agreement, entered into a bond of union against Mr. Dombey's list, who, wandering about the rooms in a desolate manner, or seeking refuge in corners, entangled themselves with company coming in, and became barricaded behind sofas, and had doors opened smartly from without against their heads, and underwent every sort of discomfiture.

When dinner was announced, Mr. Dombey took down an old lady like a crimson velvet pincushion stuffed with bank notes, who might have been the identical old lady of Threadneedle Street, she was so rich, and looked so unaccommodating; Cousin Feenix took down Mrs. Dombey; Major Bagstock took down Mrs. Skewton; the young thing with the shoulders was bestowed, as an extinguisher, upon the East India Director; and the remaining ladies were left on view in the drawing-room by the remaining gentlemen, until a forlorn hope volunteered to conduct them downstairs, and those brave spirits with their captives blocked up the dining-room door, shutting out seven mild men in the stony-hearted hall. When all the rest were got in and were seated, one of these mild men still appeared, in smiling confusion, totally destitute and unprovided for, and, escorted by the butler, made the complete circuit of the table twice before his chair could be

found, which it finally was, on Mrs. Dombey's left hand ; after which the mild man never held up his head again.

Now the spacious dining-room, with the company seated round the glittering table, busy with their glittering spoons, and knives and forks, and plates, might have been taken for a grown-up exposition of Tom Tiddler's ground, where children pick up gold and silver. Mr. Dombey, as Tiddler, looked his character to admiration ; and the long plateau of precious metal frosted, separating him from Mrs. Dombey, whereon frosted Cupids offered scentless flowers to each of them, was allegorical to see.

Cousin Feenix was in great force, and looked astonishingly young. But he was sometimes thoughtless in his good-humour—his memory occasionally wandering like his legs—and on this occasion he caused the company to shudder. It happened thus. The young lady with the back, who regarded Cousin Feenix with sentiments of tenderness, had entrapped the East India Director into leading her to the chair next him ; in return for which good office, she immediately abandoned the Director, who, being shaded on the other side by a gloomy black velvet hat surmounting a bony and speechless female with a fan, yielded to a depression of spirits, and withdrew into himself. Cousin Feenix and the young lady were very lively and humorous, and the young lady laughed so much at something Cousin Feenix related to her, that Major Pargstock begged leave to inquire, on behalf of Mrs. Skewton (they were sitting opposite, a little lower down), whether that might not be considered public property.

"Why, upon my life," said Cousin Feenix, "there's nothing in it : it really is not worth repeating : in point of fact, it's merely an anecdote of Jack Adams. I dare say my friend Dombey"—for the general attention was concentrated on Cousin Feenix—"may remember Jack Adams, Jack Adams, not Joe ; that was his brother. Jack—little Jack—man with a cast in his eye, and a slight impediment in his speech—man who sat for somebody's borough. We used to call him in my parliamentary time W. P. Adams, in consequence of his being Warming Pan for a young fellow who was in his minority. Perhaps my friend Dombey may have known the man ?"

Mr. Dombey, who was as likely to have known Guy Fawkes, replied in the negative. But one of the seven mild men unexpectedly leaped into distinction by saying he had known him, and adding—"Always wore Hessian boots !"

"Exactly," said Cousin Feenix, bending for-

ward to see the mild man, and smile encouraging at him down the table. "That was Jack. Joe wore—"

"Tops !" cried the mild man, rising in public estimation every instant.

"Of course," said Cousin Feenix, "you were intimate with 'em ?"

"I knew them both," said the mild man. With whom Mr. Dombey immediately took wine.

"Devilish good fellow, Jack !" said Cousin Feenix, again bending forward, and smiling.

"Excellent," returned the mild man, becoming bold on his success. "One of the best fellows I ever knew."

"No doubt you have heard the story ?" said Cousin Feenix.

"I shall know," replied the bold mild man, "when I have heard your Ludship tell it." With that, he leaned back in his chair and smiled at the ceiling, as knowing it by heart, and being already tickled.

"In point of fact, it's nothing of a story in itself," said Cousin Feenix, addressing the table with a smile, and a gay shake of his head, "and not worth a word of preface. But it's illustrative of the neatness of Jack's humour. The fact is, that Jack was invited down to a marriage—whichever I think took place in Barkshire ?"

"Shropshire," said the bold mild man, finding himself appealed to.

"Was it ? Well ! In point of fact, it might have been in any shire," said Cousin Feenix. "So, my friend being invited down to this marriage in Anyshire," with a pleasant sense of the readiness of this joke, "goes. Just as some of us, having had the honour of being invited to the marriage of my lovely and accomplished relative with my friend Dombey, didn't require to be asked twice, and were devilish glad to be present on so interesting an occasion.—Goes—Jack goes. Now, this marriage was, in point of fact, the marriage of an uncommonly fine girl with a man for whom she didn't care a button, but whom she accepted on account of his property, which was immense. When Jack returned to town, after the nuptials, a man he knew, meeting him in the lobby of the House of Commons, says, 'Well, Jack, how are the ill-matched couple ?' 'I'll-matched !' says Jack. 'Not at all. It's a perfectly fair and equal transaction. She is regularly bought, and you may take your oath he is as regularly sold !'"

In his full enjoyment of this culminating point of his story, the shudder which had gone all round the table like an electric spark, struck Cousin Feenix, and he stopped. Not a smile,

occasioned by the only general topic of conversation broached that day, appeared on any face. A profound silence ensued; and the wretched mild man, who had been as innocent of any real foreknowledge of the story as the child unborn, had the exquisite misery of reading in every eye that he was regarded as the prime mover of the mischief.

Mr. Dombey's face was not a changeful one, and, being cast in its mould of state that day, showed little other apprehension of the story, if any, than that which he expressed when he said solemnly, amidst the silence, that it was "Very good." There was a rapid glance from Edith towards Florence, but otherwise she remained, externally, impassive and unconscious.

Through the various stages of rich meats and wines, continual gold and silver, dainties of earth, air, fire, and water, heaped-up fruits, and that unnecessary article in Mr. Dombey's banquets—ice—the dinner slowly made its way; the later stages being achieved to the sonorous music of incessant double knocks, announcing the arrival of visitors, whose portion of the feast was limited to the smell thereof. When Mrs. Dombey rose, it was a sight to see her lord, with stiff throat, and erect head, hold the door open for the withdrawal of the ladies; and to see how she swept past him with his daughter on her arm.

Mr. Dombey was a grave sight, behind the decanters, in a state of dignity; and the East India Director was a forlorn sight, near the unoccupied end of the table, in a state of solitude; and the major was a military sight, relating stories of the Duke of York to six of the seven mild men (the ambitious one was utterly quenched); and the Bank Director was a lowly sight, making a plan of his little attempt at a pinery, with dessert knives, for a group of admirers; and Cousin Feenix was a thoughtful sight, as he smoothed his long wristbands and stealthily adjusted his wig. But all these sights were of short duration, being speedily broken up by coffee, and the desertion of the room.

There was a throng in the state rooms upstairs, increasing every minute; but still Mr. Dombey's list of visitors appeared to have some native impossibility of amalgamation with Mrs. Dombey's list, and no one could have doubted which was which. The single exception to this rule, perhaps, was Mr. Carker, who now smiled among the company, and who, as he stood in the circle that was gathered about Mrs. Dombey—watchful of her, of them, his chief, Cleopatra, and the major, Florence, and everything around—appeared at ease with both divisions of guests, and not marked as exclusively belonging to either.

Florence had a dread of him, which made his presence in the room a nightmare to her. She could not avoid the recollection of it, for her eyes were drawn towards him every now and then, by an attraction of dislike and distrust that she could not resist. Yet her thoughts were busy with other things; for as she sat apart—not unadmired or unsought, but in the gentleness of her quiet spirit—she felt how little part her father had in what was going on, and saw, with pain, how ill at ease he seemed to be, and how little regarded he was as he lingered about, near the door, for those visitors whom he wished to distinguish with particular attention, and took them up to introduce them to his wife, who received them with proud coldness, but showed no interest, or wish to please, and never, after the bare ceremony of reception, in consultation of his wishes, or in welcome of his friends, opened her lips. It was not the less perplexing or painful to Florence that she, who acted thus, treated her so kindly, and with such loving consideration, that it almost seemed an ungrateful return on her part even to know of what was passing before her eyes.

Happy Florence would have been, might she have ventured to bear her father company by so much as a look; and happy Florence was in little suspecting the main cause of his uneasiness. But afraid of seeming to know that he was placed at any disadvantage, lest he should be resentful of that knowledge; and divided between her impulse towards him, and her grateful affection for Edith; she scarcely dared to raise her eyes towards either. Anxious and unhappy for them both, the thought stole on her through the crowd, that it might have been better for them if this noise of tongues and tread of feet had never come there,—if the old dulness and decay had never been replaced by novelty and splendour,—if the neglected child had found no friend in Edith, but had lived her solitary life, unpitied and forgotten.

Mrs. Chick had some such thoughts too, but they were not so quietly developed in her mind. This good matron had been outraged, in the first instance, by not receiving an invitation to dinner. That blow partially recovered, she had gone to a vast expense to make such a figure before Mrs. Dombey at home as should dazzle the senses of that lady, and heap mortification, mountains high, on the head of Mrs. Skewton.

"But I am made," said Mrs. Chick to Mr. Chick, "of no more account than Florence. Who takes the smallest notice of me? No one!"

"No one, my dear," assented Mr. Chick, who

was seated by the side of Mrs. Chick against the wall, and could console himself, even there, by softly whistling.

"Does it at all appear as if I was wanted here?" exclaimed Mrs. Chick with flashing eyes.

"No, my dear, I don't think it does," said Mr. Chick.

"Paul's mad!" said Mrs. Chick.

Mr. Chick whistled.

"Unless you are a monster, which I sometimes think you are," said Mrs. Chick with candour, "don't sit there humming tunes. How any one, with the most distant feelings of a man, can see that mother-in-law of Paul's, dressed as she is, going on like that with Major Bagstock, for whom, among other precious things, we are indebted to your Lucretia Tox——"

"My Lucretia Tox, my dear!" said Mr. Chick, astounded.

"Yes," retorted Mrs. Chick with great severity, "*your* Lucretia Tox. I say, how anybody can see that mother-in-law of Paul's, and that haughty wife of Paul's, and those indecent old frights with their backs and shoulders, and, in short, this at home generally, and can hum"—on which word Mrs. Chick laid a scornful emphasis that made Mr. Chick start—"is, I thank Heaven, a mystery to me!"

Mr. Chick screwed his mouth into a form irreconcilable with humming or whistling, and looked very contemplative.

"But I hope I know what is due to myself," said Mrs. Chick, swelling with indignation, "though Paul has forgotten what is due to me. I am not going to sit here, a member of this family, to be taken no notice of. I am not the dirt under Mrs. Dombey's feet yet—not quite yet," said Mrs. Chick, as if she expected to become so about the day after to-morrow. "And I shall go. I will not say (whatever I may think) that this affair has been got up solely to degrade and insult me. I shall merely go. I shall not be missed!"

Mrs. Chick rose erect with these words, and took the arm of Mr. Chick, who escorted her from the room, after half an hour's shady sojourn there. And it is due to her penetration to observe that she certainly was not missed at all.

But she was not the only indignant guest. For Mr. Dombey's list (still constantly in difficulties) were, as a body, indignant with Mrs. Dombey's list, for looking at them through eye-glasses, and audibly wondering who all those people were; while Mrs. Dombey's list complained of weariness, and the young thing with the shoulders, deprived of the attentions of that gay youth,

Cousin Feenix (who went away from the dinner-table), confidentially alleged to thirty or forty friends that she was bored to death. All the old ladies with the burdens on their heads had greater or less cause of complaint against Mrs. Dombey; and the Directors and Chairmen coincided in thinking that if Dombey must marry, he had better have married somebody nearer his own age, not quite so handsome, and a little better off. The general opinion among this class of gentlemen was, that it was a weak thing in Dombey, and he'd live to repent it. Hardly anybody there, except the mild men, stayed, or went away, without considering himself or herself neglected and aggrieved by Mr. Dombey or Mrs. Dombey; and the speechless female in the black velvet hat was found to have been stricken mute, because the lady in the crimson velvet had been handed down before her. The nature even of the mild men got corrupted, either from their curdling it with too much lemonade, or from the general inoculation that prevailed; and they made sarcastic jokes to one another, and whispered disparagement on stairs and in by-places. The general dissatisfaction and discomfort so diffused itself, that the assembled footmen in the hall were as well acquainted with it as the company above. Nay, the very linkmen outside got hold of it, and compared the party to a funeral out of mourning, with none of the company remembered in the will.

At last the guests were all gone, and the linkmen too; and the street, crowded so long with carriages, was clear; and the dying lights showed no one in the rooms but Mr. Dombey and Mr. Carker, who were talking together apart, and Mrs. Dombey and her mother: the former seated on an ottoman; the latter reclining in the Cleopatra attitude, awaiting the arrival of her maid. Mr. Dombey having finished his communication to Carker, the latter advanced obsequiously to take leave.

"I trust," he said, "that the fatigues of this delightful evening will not inconvenience Mrs. Dombey to-morrow."

"Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, advancing, "has sufficiently spared herself fatigue to relieve you from any anxiety of that kind. I regret to say, Mrs. Dombey, that I could have wished you had fatigued yourself a little more on this occasion."

She looked at him with a supercilious glance, that it seemed not worth her while to protract, and turned away her eyes without speaking.

"I am sorry, madam," said Mr. Dombey, "that you should not have thought it your duty——"

She looked at him again.

"—Your duty, madam," pursued Mr. Dombey, "to have received my friends with a little more deference. Some of those whom you have been pleased to slight to-night in a very marked manner, Mrs. Dombey, confer a distinction upon you, I must tell you, in any visit they pay you."

"Do you know that there is some one here?" she returned, now looking at him steadily.

"No! Carker! I beg that you do not. I insist that you do not," cried Mr. Dombey, stopping that noiseless gentleman in his withdrawal.

"Mr. Carker, madam, as you know, possesses my confidence. He is as well acquainted as myself with the subject on which I speak. I beg to tell you, for your information, Mrs. Dombey, that I consider these wealthy and important persons confer a distinction upon *me*," and Mr. Dombey drew himself up, as having now rendered them of the highest possible importance.

"I ask you," she repeated, bending her disdainful, steady gaze upon him, "do you know that there is some one here, sir?"

"I must entreat," said Mr. Carker, stepping forward, "I must beg, I must demand, to be released. Slight and unimportant as this difference is——"

Mrs. Skewton, who had been intent upon her daughter's face, took him up here.

"My sweetest Edith," she said, "and my dearest Dombey, our excellent friend Mr. Carker, for so I am sure I ought to mention him——"

Mr. Carker murmured, "Too much honour."

"—Has used the very words that were in my mind, and that I have been dying, these ages, for an opportunity of introducing. Slight and unimportant! My sweetest Edith, and my dearest Dombey, do we not know that any difference between you two—— No, Flowers; not now."

Flowers was the maid, who, finding gentlemen present, retreated with precipitation.

"—That any difference between you two," resumed Mrs. Skewton, "with the heart you possess in common, and the excessively charming bond of feeling that there is between you, *must* be slight and unimportant? What words could better define the fact? None. Therefore I am glad to take this slight occasion—this trifling occasion, that is so replete with Nature, and your individual characters, and all that—so truly calculated to bring the tears into a parent's eyes—to say that I attach no importance to them in the least, except as developing these minor elements of Soul; and that, unlike most mammas-in-law (that odious phrase, dear Dombey!) as they have been represented to me to exist in this I fear too artificial world, I never shall

attempt to interpose between you at such a time, and never can much regret, after all, such little flashes of the torch of what's-his-name—not Cupid, but the other delightful creature."

There was a sharpness in the good mother's glance: at ~~her~~ her children, as she spoke, that may have been expressive of a direct and well-considered purpose hidden between these rambling words. That purpose, providently to detach herself in the beginning from all the clankings of their chain that were to come, and to shelter herself with the fiction of her innocent belief in their mutual affection, and their adaptation to each other.

"I have pointed out to Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey in his most stately manner, "that in her conduct, thus early in our married life, to which I object, and which I request may be corrected, Carker," with a nod of dismissal, "good night to you!"

Mr. Carker bowed to the imperious form of the bride, whose sparkling eye was fixed upon her husband; and stopping at Cleopatra's couch on his way out, raised to his lips the hand she graciously extended to him, in lowly and admiring homage.

If his handsome wife had reproached him, or even changed countenance, or broken the silence in which she remained by one word, now that they were alone (for Cleopatra made off with all speed), Mr. Dombey would have been equal to some assertion of his case against her. But the intense, unutterable, withering scorn with which, after looking upon him, she dropped her eyes as if he were too worthless and indifferent to her to be challenged with a syllable—the ineffable disdain and haughtiness in which she sat before him—the cold, inflexible resolve with which her every feature seemed to bear him down, and put him by—he had no resource against; and he left her, with her whole overbearing beauty concentrated on despising him.

Was he coward enough to watch her, an hour afterwards, on the old well staircase, where he had once seen Florence in the moonlight, toiling up with Paul? Or was he in the dark by accident, when, looking up, he saw her coming, with a light, from the room where Florence lay, and marked again the face so changed, which *he* could not subdue?

But, it could never alter as his own did. It never, in its utmost pride and passion, knew the shadow that had fallen on his, in the dark corner, on the night of the return and often since; and which deepened on it now as he looked up:

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MORE WARNINGS THAN ONE.



FLORENCE, Edith, and Mrs. Skewton were together next day, and the carriage was waiting at the door to take them out. For Cleopatra had her galley again now, and Withers, no longer the wan, stood upright in a pigeon-breasted jacket and military trousers, behind her wheel-less chair at dinner-time, and butted no more. The hair of Withers was radiant with pomatum in these days of down, and he wore kid gloves, and smelt of the water of Cologne.

They were assembled in Cleopatra's room. The Serpent of old Nile (not to mention her disrespectfully) was reposing on her sofa, sipping her morning chocolate at three o'clock in the afternoon, and Flowers the maid was fastening on her youthful cuffs and frills, and performing a kind of private coronation ceremony on her with a peach-coloured velvet bonnet; the artificial roses in which nodded to uncommon advantage, as the palsy trifled with them like a breeze.

"I think I am a little nervous this morning, Flowers," said Mrs. Skewton. "My hand quite shakes."

"You were the life of the party last night, ma'am, you know," returned Flowers, "and you suffer for it to-day, you see."

Edith, who had beckoned Florence to the window, and was looking out, with her back turned on the toilet of her esteemed mother, suddenly withdrew from it, as if it had lightened.

"My darling child," cried Cleopatra languidly, "you are not nervous? Don't tell me, my dear Edith, that you, so enviably self-possessed, are beginning to be a martyr too, like your unfortunately-constituted mother? Withers, some one at the door."

"Card, ma'am," said Withers, taking it towards Mrs. Dombey.

"I am going out," she said, without looking at it.

"My dear love," drawled Mrs. Skewton, "how very odd to send that message without seeing the name! Bring it here, Withers. Dear me, my love; Mr. Carker, too! that very sensible person!"

"I am going out," repeated Edith in so imperious a tone that Withers, going to the door, imperiously informed the servant who was waiting, "Mrs. Dombey is going out. Get along with you," and shut it on him.

But the servant came back after a short absence, and whispered to Withers again, who once more, and not very willingly, presented himself before Mrs. Dombey.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Carker sends his respectful compliments, and begs you would spare him one minute, if you could—for business, ma'am, if you please."

"Really, my love," said Mrs. Skewton in her mildest manner; for her daughter's face was threatening; "if you would allow me to offer a word, I should recommend——"

"Show him this way," said Edith. As Withers disappeared to execute the command, she added, frowning on her mother, "As he comes at your recommendation, let him come to your room."

"May I—shall I go away?" asked Florence hurriedly.

Edith nodded yes, but, on her way to the door, Florence met the visitor coming in. With the same disagreeable mixture of familiarity and forbearance with which he had first addressed her, he addressed her now in his softest manner—hoped she was quite well—needed not to ask, with such looks to anticipate the answer—had scarcely had the honour to know her last night, she was so greatly changed—and held the door open for her to pass out; with a secret sense of power in her shrinking from him, that all the deference and politeness of his manner could not quite conceal.

He then bowed himself for a moment over Mrs. Skewton's condescending hand, and lastly bowed to Edith. Coldly returning his salute without looking at him, and neither seating herself nor inviting him to be seated, she waited for him to speak.

Entrenched in her pride and power, and with all the obduracy of her spirit summoned about her, still her old conviction that she and her mother had been known by this man in their worst colours from their first acquaintance; that every degradation she had suffered in her own eyes was as plain to him as to herself; that he read her life as though it were a vile book, and fluttered the leaves before her in slight looks and tones of voice which no one else could detect; weakened and undermined her. Proudly as she opposed herself to him, with her commanding face exacting his humility, her disdainful lip repulsing him, her bosom angry at his intrusion, and the dark lashes of her eye sullenly veiling their light, that no ray of it might shine upon him—and submissively as he stood before her, with an entreating injured manner; but with complete submission to her will—she knew, in her own soul, that the cases were reversed, and

that the triumph and superiority were his, and that he knew it full well.

"I have presumed," said Mr. Carker, "to solicit an interview, and I have ventured to describe it as being one of business, because——"

"Perhaps you are charged by Mr. Dombey with some message of reproof," said Edith. "You possess Mr. Dombey's confidence in such an unusual degree, sir, that you would scarcely surprise me if that were your business."

"I have no message to the lady who sheds a

lustre upon his name," said Mr. Carker. "But I entreat that lady, on my own behalf, to be just to a very humble claimant for justice at her hands—a mere dependant of Mr. Dombey's—which is a position of humility; and to reflect upon my perfect helplessness last night, and the impossibility of my avoiding the share that was forced upon me in a very painful occasion."

"My dearest Edith," hinted Cleopatra in a low voice, as she held her eye-glass aside,



"DO YOU KNOW THAT THERE IS SOME ONE HERE?" SHE RETURNED, NOW LOOKING AT HIM STEADILY.

"really very charming of Mr. What's-his-name. And full of heart!"

"For I do," said Mr. Carker, appealing to Mrs. Skewton with a look of grateful deference,—"I do venture to call it a painful occasion, though merely because it was so to me, who had the misfortune to be present. So slight a difference, as between the principals—between those who love each other with disinterested devotion, and would make any sacrifice of self in such a cause—is nothing. As Mrs. Skewton

herself expressed, with so much truth and feeling last night, it is nothing."

Edith could not look at him, but she said after a few moments,

"And your business, sir——"

"Edith, my pet," said Mrs. Skewton, "all this time Mr. Carker is standing. My dear Mr. Carker, take a seat, I beg."

He offered no reply to the mother, but fixed his eyes on the proud daughter, as though he would only be bidden by her, and was resolved

to be bidden by her. Edith, in spite of herself, sat down, and slightly motioned with her hand to him to be seated too. No action could be colder, haughtier, more insolent in its air of supremacy and disrespect, but she had struggled against even that concession ineffectually, and it was wrested from her. That was enough! Mr. Carker sat down.

"May I be allowed, madam," said Carker, turning his white teeth on Mrs. Skewton like a light—"a lady of your excellent sense and quick feeling will give me credit for good reason, I am sure—to address what I have to say to Mrs. Dombey, and to leave her to impart it to you, who are her best and dearest friend—next to Mr. Dombey?"

Mrs. Skewton would have retired, but Edith stopped her. Edith should have stopped him too, and indignantly ordered him to speak openly, or not at all, but that he said, in a low voice—"Miss Florence—the young lady who has just left the room——"

Edith suffered him to proceed. She looked at him now. As he bent forward, to be nearer, with the utmost show of delicacy and respect, and with his teeth persuasively arrayed in a self-depreciating smile, she felt as if she could have struck him dead.

"Miss Florence's position," he began, "has been an unfortunate one. I have a difficulty in alluding to it to you, whose attachment to her father is naturally watchful and jealous of every word that applies to him." Always distinct and soft in speech, no language could describe the extent of his distinctness and softness when he said these words, or came to any others of a similar import. "But, as one who is devoted to Mr. Dombey in his different way, and whose life is passed in admiration of Mr. Dombey's character, may I say, without offence to your tenderness as a wife, that Miss Florence has unhappily been neglected—by her father? May I say by her father?"

Edith replied, "I know it."

"You know it!" said Mr. Carker, with a great appearance of relief. "It removes a mountain from my breast. May I hope you know how the neglect originated; in what an amiable phase of Mr. Dombey's pride—character I mean?"

"You may pass that by, sir," she returned, "and come the sooner to the end of what you have to say."

"Indeed, I am sensible, madam," replied Carker,—"trust me, I am deeply sensible that Mr. Dombey can require no justification in anything to you. But, kindly judge of my breast by your own, and you will forgive my

interest in him, if, in its excess, it goes at all astray."

What a stab to her proud heart to sit there, face to face with him, and have him tendering her false oath at the altar again and again for her acceptance, and pressing it upon her like the dregs of a sickening cup she could not own her loathing of, or turn away from! How shame, remorse, and passion raged within her, when, upright in her beauty before him, she knew that in her spirit she was down at his feet!

"Miss Florence," said Carker, "left to the care—if one may call it care—of servants and mercenary people, in every way—her inferiors, necessarily wanted some guide and compass in her younger days, and, naturally, for want of them, has been indiscreet, and has in some degree forgotten her station. There was some folly about one Walter, a common lad, who is fortunately dead now; and some very undesirable association, I regret to say, with certain coasting sailors, of anything but good repute, and a run-away old bankrupt."

"I have heard the circumstances, sir," said Edith, flashing her disdainful glance upon him, "and I know that you pervert them. You may not know it; I hope so."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Carker, "I believe that nobody knows them so well as I. Your generous and ardent nature, madam—the same nature which is so nobly imperative in vindication of your beloved and honoured husband, and which has blessed him as even his merits deserve—I must respect, defer to, bow before. But, as regards the circumstances, which is, indeed, the business I presumed to solicit your attention to, I can have no doubt, since in the execution of my trust as Mr. Dombey's confidential—I presume to say—friend, I have fully ascertained them. In my execution of that trust; in my deep concern, which you can so well understand, for everything relating to him, intensified, if you will, (for I fear I labour under your displeasure,) by the lower motive of desire to prove my diligence, and make myself the more acceptable; I have long pursued these circumstances by myself and trustworthy instruments, and have innumerable and most minute proofs."

She raised her eyes no higher than his mouth, but she saw the means of mischief vaunted in every tooth it contained.

"Pardon me, madam," he continued, "if, in my perplexity, I presume to take counsel with you, and to consult your pleasure. I think I have observed that you are greatly interested in Miss Florence?"

What was there in her he had not observed, and did not know? Humbled and yet madened by the thought, in every new presentment of it, however faint, she pressed her teeth upon her quivering lip to force composure on it, and distantly inclined her head in reply.

"This interest, madam—so touching an evidence of everything associated with Mr. Dombey being dear to you—induces me to pause before I make him acquainted with these circumstances, which, as yet, he does not know. It so far shakes me, if I may make the confession, in my allegiance, that on the intimation of the least desire to that effect from you, I would suppress them."

Edith raised her head quickly, and starting back, bent her dark glance upon him. He met it with his blandest and most deferential smile, and went on.

"You say that, as I describe them, they are perverted. I fear not—I fear not: but let us assume that they are. The uneasiness I have for some time felt on the subject arises in this: that the mere circumstance of such association, often repeated, on the part of Miss Florence, however innocently and confidently, would be conclusive with Mr. Dombey, already predisposed against her, and would lead him to take some step (I know he has occasionally contemplated it) of separation and alienation of her from his home. Madam, bear with me, and remember my intercourse with Mr. Dombey, and my knowledge of him, and my reverence for him, almost from childhood, when I say that if he has a fault, it is a lofty stubbornness, rooted in that noble pride and sense of power which belong to him, and which we must all defer to; which is not assailable like the obstinacy of other characters; and which grows upon itself from day to day, and year to year.

She bent her glance upon him still; but, look as steadfast as she would, her haughty nostrils dilated, and her breath came somewhat deeper, and her lip would slightly curl as he described that in his patron to which they must all bow down. He saw it; and though his expression did not change, she knew he saw it.

"Even so slight an incident as last night's," he said, "if I might refer to it once more, would serve to illustrate my meaning better than a greater one. Dombey and Son know neither time, nor place, nor season, but bear them all down. But I rejoice in its occurrence, for it has opened the way for me to approach Mrs. Dombey with this subject to-day, even if it has entailed upon me the penalty of her temporary displeasure. Madam, in the midst of my un-

easiness and apprehension on this subject, I was summoned by Mr. Dombey to Leamington. There I saw you. There I could not help knowing what relation you would shortly occupy towards him—to his enduring happiness and yours. There I resolved to await the time of your establishment at home here, and to do as I have now done. I have at heart no fear that I shall be wanting in my duty to Mr. Dombey if I bury what I know in your breast; for where there is but one heart and mind between two persons—as in such a marriage—one almost represents the other. I can acquit my conscience therefore, almost equally, by confidence, on such a theme, in you or him. For the reasons I have mentioned, I would select you. May I aspire to the distinction of believing that my confidence is accepted, and that I am relieved from my responsibility?"

He long remembered the look she gave him—who could see it, and forget it?—and the struggle that ensued within her. At last she said:

"I accept it, sir. You will please to consider this matter at an end, and that it goes no farther."

He bowed low, and rose. She rose too, and he took leave with all humility. But Withers, meeting him on the stairs, stood amazed at the beauty of his teeth, and at his brilliant smile; and, as he rode away upon his white-legged horse, the people took him for a dentist, such was the dazzling show he made. The people took her, when she rode out in her carriage presently, for a great lady, as happy as she was rich and fine. But, they had not seen her, just before, in her own room, with no one by; and they had not heard her utterance of the three words, "Oh, Florence, Florence!"

Mrs. Skewton, reposing on her sofa, and sipping her chocolate, had heard nothing but the low word business, for which she had a mortal aversion, inasmuch that she had long banished it from her vocabulary, and had gone nigh, in a charming manner and with an immense amount of heart (to say nothing of soul), to ruin divers milliners and others in consequence. Therefore, Mrs. Skewton asked no questions, and showed no curiosity. Indeed, the peach-velvet bonnet gave her sufficient occupation out of doors: for, being perched on the back of her head, and the day being rather windy, it was frantic to escape from Mrs. Skewton's company, and would be coaxed into no sort of compromise. When the carriage was closed, and the wind shut out, the palsy played among the artificial roses again, like an almshouse full of superannuated zephyrs;

and altogether Mrs. Skewton had enough to do, and got on but indifferently.

She got on no better towards night; for when Mrs. Dombey, in her dressing-room, had been dressed and waiting for her half an hour, and Mr. Dombey, in the drawing-room, had paraded himself into a state of solemn fretfulness (they were all three going out to dinner), Flowers the maid appeared with a pale face to Mrs. Dombey, saying:

"If you please, ma'am, I beg your pardon, but I can't do nothing with missis."

"What do you mean?" asked Edith.

"Well, ma'am," replied the frightened maid, "I hardly know. She's making faces!"

Edith hurried with her to her mother's room. Cleopatra was arrayed in full dress, with the diamonds, short sleeves, rouge, curls, teeth, and other juvenility all complete; but Paralysis was not to be deceived, had known her for the object of its errand, and had struck her at her glass, where she lay like a horrible doll that had tumbled down.

They took her to pieces in very shame, and put the little of her that was real on a bed. Doctors were sent for, and soon came. Powerful remedies were resorted to; opinions given that she would rally from this shock, but would not survive another; and there she lay speechless, and staring at the ceiling, for days: sometimes making inarticulate sounds in answer to such questions as, did she know who were present? and the like: sometimes giving no reply, either by sign or gesture, or in her unwinking eyes.

At length she began to recover consciousness, and in some degree the power of motion, though not yet of speech. One day the use of her right hand returned; and showing it to her maid, who was in attendance on her, and appearing very uneasy in her mind, she made signs for a pencil and some paper. This the maid immediately provided, thinking she was going to make a will, or write some last request; and Mrs. Dombey being from home, the maid awaited the result with solemn feelings.

After much painful scrawling and erasing, and putting in of wrong characters, which seemed to tumble out of the pencil of their own accord, the old woman produced this document:

"Rose-coloured curtains."

The maid being perfectly transfixed, and with tolerable reason, Cleopatra amended the manuscript by adding two words more, when it stood thus:

"Rose-coloured curtains for doctors."

The maid now perceived remotely that she wished these articles to be provided for the

better presentation of her complexion to the faculty; and as those in the house who knew her best had no doubt of the correctness of this opinion, which she was soon able to establish for herself, the rose-coloured curtains were added to her bed, and she mended with increased rapidity from that hour. She was soon able to sit up, in curls and a laced cap and nightgown, and to have a little artificial bloom dropped into the hollow caverns of her cheeks.

It was a tremendous sight to see this old woman in her finery leering and mincing at Death, and playing off her youthful tricks upon him as if he had been the major; but an alteration in her mind that ensued on the paralytic stroke was fraught with as much matter for reflection, and was quite as ghastly.

Whether the weakening of her intellect made her more cunning and false than before, or whether it confused her between what she had assumed to be and what she really had been, or whether it had awakened any glimmering of remorse, which could neither struggle into light nor get back into total darkness, or whether, in the jumble of her faculties, a combination of these effects had been shaken up, which is perhaps the more likely supposition, the result was this:—That she became hugely exacting in respect to Edith's affection and gratitude and attention to her; highly laudatory of herself as a most inestimable parent; and very jealous of having any rival in Edith's regard. Further, in place of remembering that compact made between them for an avoidance of the subject, she constantly alluded to her daughter's marriage as a proof of her being an incomparable mother; and all this, with the weakness and peevishness of such a state, always serving for a sarcastic commentary on her levity and youthfulness.

"Where is Mrs. Dombey?" she would say to her maid.

"Gone out, ma'am."

"Gone out! Does she go out to shun her mamma, Flowers?"

"La bless you, no, ma'am. Mrs. Dombey has only gone out for a ride with Miss Florence."

"Miss Florence! Who's Miss Florence? Don't tell me about Miss Florence. What's Miss Florence to her, compared to me?"

The apposite display of the diamonds, or the peach-velvet bonnet (she sat in the bonnet to receive visitors, weeks before she could stir out of doors), or the dressing of her up in some gaud or other, usually stopped the tears that began to flow hereabouts; and she would remain in a complaisant state until Edith came to see

her; when, at a glance of the proud face, she would relapse again.

"Well, I am sure, Edith!" she would cry, shaking her head.

"What is the matter, mother?"

"Matter! I really don't know what is the

matter. The world is coming to such an artificial and ungrateful state, that I begin to think there's no Heart—or anything of that sort—left in it, positively. Withers is more a child to me than you are. He attends to me much more than my own daughter. I almost wish I didn't



"WITHERS, MEETING HIM ON THE STAIRS, STOOD AMAZED AT THE BEAUTY OF HIS TEFETH, AND AT HIS BRILLIANT SMILE."

look so young—and all that kind of thing—and then perhaps I should be more considered."

"What would you have, mother?"

"Oh, a great deal, Edith," impatiently.

"Is there anything you want that you have not? It is your own fault if there be."

"My own fault!" beginning to whimper.

"The parent I have been to you, Edith: making you a companion from your cradle! And when you neglect me, and have no more natural affection for me than if I was a stranger—not a twentieth part of the affection that you have for

Florence—but I am only your mother, and should corrupt *her* in a day!—you reproach me with its being my own fault.”

“Mother, mother, I reproach you with nothing. Why will you always dwell on this?”

“Isn't it natural that I should dwell on this, when I am all affection and sensitiveness, and am wounded in the cruellest way, whenever you look at me?”

“I do not mean to wound you, mother. Have you no remembrance of what has been said between us? Let the past rest.”

“Yes, rest! And let gratitude to me rest; and let affection for me rest; and let *me* rest in my out-of-the-way room, with no society and no attention, while you find new relations to make much of, who have no earthly claim upon you! Good gracious, Edith, do you know what an elegant establishment you are at the head of?”

“Yes. Hush!”

“And that gentlemanly creature, Dombey—do you know that you are married to him, Edith, and that you have a settlement, and a position, and a carriage, and I don't know what?”

“Indeed I know it, mother; well.”

“As you would have had with that delightful good soul—what did they call him?—Granger—if he hadn't died. And who have you to thank for all this, Edith?”

“You, mother; you.”

“Then put your arms round my neck, and kiss me; and show me, Edith, that you know there never was a better mamma than I have been to you. And don't let me become a perfect fright with teasing and wearing myself at your ingratitude, or when I am out again in society no soul will know me, not even that hateful animal, the major.”

But sometimes, when Edith went nearer to her, and, bending down her stately head, put her cold cheek to hers, the mother would draw back as if she were afraid of her, and would fall into a fit of trembling, and cry out that there was a wandering in her wits. And sometimes she would entreat her, with humility, to sit down on the chair beside her bed, and would look at her (as she sat there brooding) with a face that even the rose-coloured curtains could not make otherwise than seared and wild.

The rose-coloured curtains blushed, in course of time, on Cleopatra's bodily recovery, and on her dress—more juvenile than ever, to repair the ravages of illness—and on the rouge, and on the teeth, and on the curls, and on the diamonds, and the short sleeves, and the whole wardrobe of the doll that had tumbled down before the mirror. They blushed, too, now and then, upon

an indistinctness in her speech, which she turned off with a girlish giggle, and on an occasional failing in her memory, that had no rule in it, but came and went fantastically, as if in mockery of her fantastic self.

But they never blushed upon a change in the new manner of her thought and speech towards her daughter. And though that daughter often came within their influence, they never blushed upon her loveliness irradiated by a smile, or softened by the light of filial love, in its stern beauty.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MISS TOX IMPROVES AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.



THE forlorn Miss Tox, abandoned by her friend Louisa Chick, and bereft of Mr. Dombey's countenance—for no delicate pair of wedding-cards, united by a silver thread, graced the chimney-glass in Princess's Place, or the harpsichord, or any of those little posts of display which Lucretia reserved for holiday occupation—became depressed in her spirits, and suffered much from melancholy. For a time the Bird Waltz was unheard in Princess's Place, the plants were neglected, and dust collected on the miniature of Miss Tox's ancestor with the powdered head and pigtail.

Miss Tox, however, was not of an age or of a disposition long to abandon herself to unavailing regrets. Only two notes of the harpsichord were dumb from disuse when the Bird Waltz again warbled and trilled in the crooked drawing-room; only one slip of geranium fell a victim to imperfect nursing, before she was gardening at her green baskets again, regularly every morning; the powdered-headed ancestor had not been under a cloud for more than six weeks, when Miss Tox breathed on his benignant visage, and polished him up with a piece of wash-leather.

Still, Miss Tox was lonely, and at a loss. Her attachments, however ludicrously shown, were real and strong; and she was, as she expressed it, “deeply hurt by the unmerited contumely she had met with from Louisa.” But there was no such thing as anger in Miss Tox's composition. If she had ambled on through life, in her soft-spoken way, without any opinions, she had, at least, got so far without any harsh passions. The mere sight of Louisa Chick in the street one day, at a considerable distance, so overpowered her milky nature, that she was fain to seek im-

mediate refuge in a pastrycook's, and there, in a musty little back-room usually devoted to the consumption of soups, and pervaded by an ox-tail atmosphere, relieve her feelings by weeping plentifully.

Against Mr. Dombey Miss Tox hardly felt that she had any reason of complaint. Her sense of that gentleman's magnificence was such that, once removed from him, she felt as if her distance always had been immeasurable, and as if he had greatly condescended in tolerating her at all. No wife could be too handsome or too stately for him, according to Miss Tox's sincere opinion. It was perfectly natural that, in looking for one, he should look high. Miss Tox with tears laid down this proposition, and fully admitted it twenty times a day. She never recalled the lofty manner in which Mr. Dombey had made her subservient to his convenience and caprices, and had graciously permitted her to be one of the nurses of his little son. She only thought, in her own words, "that she had passed a great many happy hours in that house, which she must ever remember with gratification, and that she could never cease to regard Mr. Dombey as one of the most impressive and dignified of men."

Cut off, however, from the implacable Louisa, and being shy of the major (whom she viewed with some distrust now), Miss Tox found it very irksome to know nothing of what was going on in Mr. Dombey's establishment. And, as she really had got into the habit of considering Dombey and Son as the pivot on which the world in general turned, she resolved, rather than be ignorant of intelligence, which so strongly interested her, to cultivate her old acquaintance, Mrs. Richards, who she knew, since her last memorable appearance before Mr. Dombey, was in the habit of sometimes holding communication with his servants. Perhaps Miss Tox, in seeking out the Toodle family, had the tender motive hidden in her breast of having somebody to whom she could talk about Mr. Dombey, no matter how humble that somebody might be.

At all events, towards the Toodle habitation Miss Tox directed her steps one evening, what time Mr. Toodle, cindery and swart, was refreshing himself with tea in the bosom of his family. Mr. Toodle had only three stages of existence. He was either taking refreshment in the bosom just mentioned, or he was tearing through the country at from twenty-five to fifty miles an hour, or he was sleeping after his fatigues. He was always in a whirlwind or a calm, and a peaceable, contented, easy-going

man Mr. Toodle was in either state. He seemed to have made over all his own inheritance of fuming and fretting to the engines with which he was connected, which panted, and gasped, and chafed, and wore themselves out in a most unsparing manner, while Mr. Toodle led a mild and equable life.

"Polly, my gal," said Mr. Toodle, with a young Toodle on each knee, and two more making tea for him, and plenty more scattered about—Mr. Toodle was never out of children but always kept a good supply on hand—"you an't seen our Biler lately, have you?"

"No," replied Polly, "but he's almost certain to look in to-night. It's his right evening, and he's very regular."

"I suppose," said Mr. Toodle, relishing his meal infinitely, "as our Biler is a doin' now about as well as a boy *can* do, eh, Polly?"

"Oh! he's a doing beautiful!" responded Polly.

"He an't got to be at all secret-like—has he, Polly?" inquired Mr. Toodle.

"No!" said Mrs. Toodle plumply.

"I'm glad he an't got to be at all secret-like, Polly," observed Mr. Toodle in his slow and measured way, and shovelling in his bread-and-butter with a clasp-knife, as if he were stoking himself, "because that don't look well; do it, Polly?"

"Why, of course it don't, father. How can you ask?"

"You see, my boys and gals," said Mr. Toodle looking round upon his family, "wotever you're up to in a honest way, it's my opinion as you can't do better than be open. If you find yourselves in cuttings or in tunnels, don't you play no secret games. Keep your whistles going and let's know where you are."

The rising Toodles set up a shrill murmur expressive of their resolution to profit by the paternal advice.

"But what makes you say this along of Rob, father?" asked his wife anxiously.

"Polly, old 'ooman," said Mr. Toodle, "I don't know as I said it particular along o' Rob I'm sure. I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man's thoughts is," said Mr. Toodle, "to-be-sure!"

This profound reflection Mr. Toodle washed down with a pint mug of tea, and proceeded to solidify with a great weight of bread-and-butter, charging his young daughters, meanwhile, to keep plenty of hot water in the pot, as he was

uncommon dry, and should take the indefinite quantity of "a sight of mugs," before his thirst was appeased.

In satisfying himself, however, Mr. Toodle was not regardless of the younger branches about him, who, although they had made their own evening repast, were on the look-out for irregular morsels, as possessing a relish. These he distributed now and then to the expectant circle, by holding out great wedges of bread-and-butter, to be bitten at by the family in lawful succession, and by serving out small doses of tea in like manner with a spoon; which snacks had such a relish in the mouths of these young Toodles, that, after partaking of the same, they performed private dances of ecstasy among themselves, and stood on one leg apiece, and hopped, and indulged in other salutory tokens of gladness. These vents for their excitement found, they gradually closed about Mr. Toodle again, and eyed him hard as he got through more bread-and-butter and tea: affecting, however, to have no further expectations of their own in reference to those viands, but to be conversing on foreign subjects, and whispering confidentially.

Mr. Toodle, in the midst of this family group, and setting an awful example to his children in the way of appetite, was conveying the two young Toodles on his knees to Birmingham by special engine, and was contemplating the rest over a barrier of bread-and-butter, when Rob the Grinder, in his sou'-wester hat and mourning slops, presented himself, and was received with a general rush of brothers and sisters.

"Well, mother!" said Rob, dutifully kissing her; "how are you, mother?"

"There's my boy!" cried Polly, giving him a hug, and a pat on the back. "Secret! Bless you, father, not he!"

This was intended for Mr. Toodle's private edification, but Rob the Grinder, whose withers were not unwrung, caught the words as they were spoken.

"What! father's been a saying something more again me, has he?" cried the injured innocent. "Oh, what a hard thing it is that when a cove has once gone a little wrong, a cove's own father should be always a throwing it in his face behind his back! It's enough," cried Rob, resorting to his coat-cuff in anguish of spirit, "to make a cove go and do something out of spite!"

"My poor boy!" cried Polly, "father didn't mean anything."

"If father didn't mean anything," blubbered the injured Grinder, "why did he go and say

anything, mother? Nobody thinks half so bad of me as my own father does. What a unnatural thing! I wish somebody'd take and chop my head off. Father wouldn't mind doing it, I believe, and I'd much rather he did that than t'other."

At these desperate words all the young Toodles shrieked; a pathetic effect, which the Grinder improved by ironically adjuring them not to cry for him, for they ought to hate him, they ought, if they was good boys and girls; and this so touched the youngest Toodle but one, who was easily moved, that it touched him not only in his spirit, but in his wind too; making him so purple that Mr. Toodle, in consternation, carried him out to the water-butt, and would have put him under the tap, but for his being recovered by the sight of that instrument.

Matters having reached this point, Mr. Toodle explained, and the virtuous feelings of his son being thereby calmed, they shook hands, and harmony reigned again.

"Will you do as I do, Biler, my boy?" inquired his father, returning to his tea with new strength.

"No, thankee, father. Master and I had tea together."

"And how is master, Rob?" said Polly.

"Well, I don't know, mother; not much to boast on. There ain't no business done, you see. He don't know anything about it, the cap'en don't. There was a man come into the shop this very day, and says, 'I want a so-and-so,' he says—some hard name or other. 'A which?' says the cap'en. 'A so-and-so,' says the man. 'Brother,' says the cap'en, 'will you take a observation round the shop?' 'Well,' says the man, 'I've done it.' 'Do you see wot you want?' says the cap'en. 'No, I don't,' says the man. 'Do you know it wen you do see it?' says the cap'en. 'No, I don't,' says the man. 'Why, then, I tell you wot, my lad,' says the cap'en, 'you'd better go back and ask wot it's like outside, for no more don't I!'"

"That an't the way to make money, though, is it?" said Polly.

"Money, mother! He'll never make money. He has such ways as I never see. He an't a bad master, though, I'll say that for him. But that an't much to me, for I don't think I shall stop with him long."

"Not stop in your place, Rob!" cried his mother; while Mr. Toodle opened his eyes.

"Not in that place, p'raps," returned the Grinder with a wink. "I shouldn't wonder—friends at court, you know—but never you mind mother, just now; I'm all right, that's all."

The indisputable proof afforded in these hints, and in the Grinder's mysterious manner, of his not being subject to that failing which Mr. Toodle had, by implication, attributed to him, might have led to a renewal of his wrongs, and of the sensation in the family, but for the opportune arrival of another visitor, who, to Polly's great surprise, appeared at the door, smiling patronage and friendship on all there.

"How do you do, Mrs. Richards?" said Miss Tox. "I have come to see you. May I come in?"

The cheery face of Mrs. Richards shone with a hospitable reply, and Miss Tox, accepting the proffered chair, and gracefully recognising Mr. Toodle on her way to it, untied her bonnet strings, and said that, in the first place, she must beg the dear children, one and all, to come and kiss her.

The ill-starred youngest Toodle but one, who would appear, from the frequency of his domestic troubles, to have been born under an unlucky planet, was prevented from performing his part in this general salutation by having fixed the sou-wester hat (with which he had been previously trifling) deep on his head, hind side before, and being unable to get it off again; which accident presenting to his terrified imagination a dismal picture of his passing the rest of his days in darkness, and in hopeless seclusion from his friends and family, caused him to struggle with great violence, and to utter suffocating cries. Being released, his face was discovered to be very hot, and red, and damp; and Miss Tox took him on her lap, much exhausted.

"You have almost forgotten me, sir, I dare say?" said Miss Tox to Mr. Toodle.

"No, ma'am, no," said Toodle. "But we've all on us got a little older since then."

"And how do you find yourself, sir?" inquired Miss Tox blandly.

"Hearty, ma'am, thankee," replied Toodle. "How do you find yourself, ma'am? Do the rheumaticks keep off pretty well, ma'am? We must all expect to grow into 'em as we gets on."

"Thank you," said Miss Tox. "I have not felt any inconvenience from that disorder yet."

"You're wery fortunate, ma'am," returned Mr. Toodle. "Many people at your time of life, ma'am, is martyrs to it. There was my mother——" But catching his wife's eye here, Mr. Toodle judiciously buried the rest in another mug of tea.

"You never mean to say, Mrs. Richards,"

cried Miss Tox, looking at Rob, "that that is your——"

"Eldest, ma'am," said Polly. "Yes, indeed, it is. That's the little fellow, ma'am, that was the innocent cause of so much."

"This here, ma'am," said Toodle, "is him with the short legs—and they was," said Mr. Toodle, with a touch of poetry in his tone, "unusual short for leathers—as Mr. Dombey made a Grinder on."

The recollection almost overpowered Miss Tox. The subject of it had a peculiar interest for her directly. She asked him to shake hands, and congratulated his mother on his frank, ingenuous face. Rob, overhearing her, called up a look to justify the eulogium, but it was hardly the right look.

"And now, Mrs. Richards," said Miss Tox,—"and you too, sir," addressing Toodle,—"I'll tell you, plainly and truly, what I have come here for. You may be aware, Mrs. Richards—and possibly you may be aware too, sir—that a little distance has interposed itself between me and some of my friends, and that where I used to visit a good deal I do not visit now."

Polly, who, with a woman's tact, understood this at once, expressed as much in a little look. Mr. Toodle, who had not the faintest idea what Miss Tox was talking about, expressed that, also, in a stare.

"Of course," said Miss Tox, "how our little coolness has arisen is of no moment, and does not require to be discussed. It is sufficient for me to say that I have the greatest possible respect for, and interest in, Mr. Dombey;" Miss Tox's voice faltered; "and everything that relates to him."

Mr. Toodle, enlightened, shook his head, and said he had heard it said, and, for his own part, he did think, as Mr. Dombey was a difficult subject.

"Pray don't say so, sir, if you please," returned Miss Tox. "Let me entreat you not to say so, sir, either now, or at any future time. Such observations cannot but be very painful to me; and to a gentleman, whose mind is constituted as I am quite sure yours is, can afford no permanent satisfaction."

Mr. Toodle, who had not entertained the least doubt of offering a remark that would be received with acquiescence, was greatly confounded.

"All that I wish to say, Mrs. Richards," resumed Miss Tox,—"and I address myself to you too, sir,—is this. That any intelligence of the proceedings of the family, of the welfare of the family, of the health of the family, that

reaches you, will be always most acceptable to me. That I shall be always very glad to chat with Mrs. Richards about the family, and about old times. And as Mrs. Richards and I never had the least difference (though I could wish now that we had been better acquainted, but I have no one but myself to blame for that), I hope she will not object to our being very good friends now, and to my coming backwards and forwards here when I like, without being a stranger. Now, I really hope, Mrs. Richards," said Miss Tox earnestly, "that you will take this as I mean it, like a good-humoured creature as you always were."

Polly was gratified, and showed it. Mr. Toodle didn't know whether he was gratified or not, and preserved a stolid calmness.

"You see, Mrs. Richards," said Miss Tox—"and I hope you see too, sir—there are many little ways in which I can be slightly useful to you, if you will make no stranger of me; and in which I shall be delighted to be so. For instance, I can teach your children something. I shall bring a few little books if you'll allow me, and some work, and of an evening, now and then, they'll learn—dear me, they'll learn a great deal, I trust, and be a credit to their teacher."

Mr. Toodle, who had a great respect for learning, jerked his head approvingly at his wife, and moistened his hands with dawning satisfaction.

"Then, not being a stranger, I shall be in nobody's way," said Miss Tox, "and everything will go on just as if I were not here. Mrs. Richards will do her mending, or her ironing, or her nursing, whatever it is, without minding me; and you'll smoke your pipe, too, if you're so disposed, sir, won't you?"

"Thankee, mum," said Mr. Toodle. "Yes; I'll take my bit of backer."

"Very good of you to say so, sir," rejoined Miss Tox, "and I really do assure you now, unfeignedly, that it will be a great comfort to me, and that whatever good I may be fortunate enough to do the children, you will more than pay back to me, if you'll enter into this little bargain comfortably, and easily, and good-naturedly, without another word about it."

The bargain was ratified on the spot; and Miss Tox found herself so much at home already, that without delay she instituted a preliminary examination of the children all round—which Mr. Toodle much admired—and booked their ages, names, and acquirements on a piece of paper. This ceremony, and a little attendant gossip, prolonged the time until after their usual hour of going to bed, and detained

Miss Tox at the Toodle fireside until it was too late for her to walk home alone. The gallant Grinder, however, being still there, politely offered to attend her to her own door; and as it was something to Miss Tox to be seen home by a youth whom Mr. Dombey had first inducted into those manly garments which are rarely mentioned by name, she very readily accepted the proposal.

After shaking hands with Mr. Toodle and Polly, and kissing all the children, Miss Tox left the house, therefore, with unlimited popularity, and carrying away with her so light a heart that it might have given Mrs. Chick offence if that good lady could have weighed it.

Rob the Grinder, in his modesty, would have walked behind, but Miss Tox desired him to keep beside her, for conversational purposes; and, as she afterwards expressed it to his mother, "drew him out" upon the road.

He drew out so bright, and clear, and shining, that Miss Tox was charmed with him. The more Miss Tox drew him out, the finer he came—like wire. There never was a better or more promising youth—a more affectionate, steady, prudent, sober, honest, meek, candid young man—than Rob drew out that night.

"I am quite glad," said Miss Tox, arrived at her own door, "to know you. I hope you'll consider me your friend, and that you'll come and see me as often as you like. Do you keep a money-box?"

"Yes, ma'am," returned Rob; "I'm saving up against I've got enough to put in the Bank, ma'am."

"Very laudable, indeed," said Miss Tox. "I'm glad to hear it. Put this half-crown into it, if you please."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am," replied Rob, "but really I couldn't think of depriving you."

"I commend your independent spirit," said Miss Tox, "but it's no deprivation, I assure you. I shall be offended if you don't take it, as a mark of my good-will. Good night, Robin."

"Good night, ma'am," said Rob, "and thank you!"

Who ran sniggering off to get change, and tossed it away with a piuman. But they never taught honour at the Grinders' School, where the system that prevailed was particularly strong in the engendering of hypocrisy. Inasmuch that many of the friends and masters of past Grinders said, If this were what came of education for the common people, let us have none. Some more rationally said, Let us have a better one. But, the governing powers of the Grinders' Company were always ready for *them*, by picking out a few boys who had turned out well, in spite of the

system, and roundly asserting that they could have only turned out well because of it. Which settled the business of those objectors out of hand, and established the glory of the Grinders' Institution.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN EDWARD CUTTLE,
MARINER.

TIME, sure of foot and strong of will, had so pressed onward, that the year enjoined by the old instrument-maker, as the term during which his friend should refrain from opening the sealed packet accompanying the letter he had left for him, was now nearly expired, and Captain Cuttle began to look at it of an evening with feelings of mystery and uneasiness.

The captain, in his honour, would as soon have thought of opening the parcel one hour before the expiration of the term as he would have thought of opening himself, to study his own anatomy. He merely brought it out, at a certain stage of his first evening pipe, laid it on the table, and sat gazing at the outside of it, through the smoke, in silent gravity, for two or three hours at a spell. Sometimes, when he had contemplated it thus for a pretty long while, the captain would hitch his chair, by degrees, farther and farther off, as if to get beyond the range of its fascination; but, if this were his design, he never succeeded: for even when he was brought up by the parlour wall, the packet still attracted him; or if his eyes, in thoughtful wandering, roved to the ceiling or the fire, its image immediately followed, and posted itself conspicuously among the coals, or took up an advantageous position on the whitewash.

In respect of Heart's Delight, the captain's parental regard and admiration knew no change. But, since his last interview with Mr. Carker, Captain Cuttle had come to entertain doubts whether his former intervention in behalf of that young lady and his dear boy Walr had proved altogether so favourable as he could have wished, and as he at the time believed. The captain was troubled with a serious misgiving that he had done more harm than good, in short; and, in his remorse and modesty, he made the best atonement he could think of, by putting himself out of the way of doing any harm to any one, and, as it were, throwing himself overboard for a dangerous person.

Self-buried, therefore, among the instruments, the captain never went near Mr. Dombey's house, or reported himself in any way to Florence or Miss Nipper. He even severed himself from Mr. Perch, on the occasion of his next visit, by drily informing that gentleman that he thanked him for his company, but had cut himself adrift from all such acquaintance, as he didn't know what magazine he mightn't blow up, without meaning of it. In this self-imposed retirement the captain passed whole days and weeks without interchanging a word with any one but Rob the Grinder, whom he esteemed as a pattern of disinterested attachment and fidelity. In this retirement, the captain, gazing at the packet of an evening, would sit smoking, and thinking of Florence and poor Walter, until they both seemed to his homely fancy to be dead, and to have passed away into eternal youth, the beautiful and innocent children of his first remembrance.

The captain did not, however, in his musings, neglect his own improvement, or the mental culture of Rob the Grinder. That young man was generally required to read out of some book to the captain for one hour every evening; and, as the captain implicitly believed that all books were true, he accumulated, by this means, many remarkable facts. On Sunday nights the captain always read for himself, before going to bed, a certain Divine Sermon once delivered on a Mount; and although he was accustomed to quote the text, without book, after his own manner, he appeared to read it with as reverent an understanding of its heavenly spirit as if he had got it all by heart in Greek, and had been able to write any number of fierce theological disquisitions on its every phrase.

Rob the Grinder, whose reverence for the inspired writings, under the admirable system of the Grinders' School, had been developed by a perpetual bruising of his intellectual shins against all the proper names of all the tribes of Judah, and by the monotonous repetition of hard verses, especially by way of punishment, and by the parading of him at six years old in leather breeches three times a Sunday, very high up, in a very hot church, with a great organ buzzing against his drowsy head, like an exceedingly busy bee—Rob the Grinder made a mighty show of being edified when the captain ceased to read, and generally yawned and nodded while the reading was in progress. The latter fact being never so much as suspected by the good captain.

Captain Cuttle, also, as a man of business, took to keeping books. In these he entered observations on the weather, and on the currents

of the waggons and other vehicles : which he observed, in that quarter, to set westward in the morning and during the greater part of the day, and eastward towards the evening. Two or three stragglers appearing in one week, who "spoke him"—so the captain entered it—on the subject of spectacles, and who, without positively purchasing, said they would look in again, the captain decided that the business was improving, and made an entry in the day-book to that effect ; the wind then blowing (which he first recorded) pretty fresh, west and by north ; having changed in the night.

One of the captain's chief difficulties was Mr. Toots, who called frequently, and who, without saying much, seemed to have an idea that the little back-parlour was an eligible room to chuckle in, as he would sit and avail himself of its accommodations in that regard by the half-hour together, without at all advancing in intimacy with the captain. The captain, rendered cautious by his late experience, was unable quite to satisfy his mind whether Mr. Toots was the mild subject he appeared to be, or was a profoundly artful and dissimulating hypocrite. His frequent reference to Miss Dombey was suspicious ; but the captain had a secret kindness for Mr. Toots's apparent reliance on him, and forbore to decide against him for the present ; merely eyeing him, with a sagacity not to be described, whenever he approached the subject that was nearest to his heart.

"Captain Gills," blurted out Mr. Toots one day all at once, as his manner was, "do you think you could think favourably of that proposition of mine, and give me the pleasure of your acquaintance?"

"Why, I'll tell you what it is, my lad," replied the captain, who had at length concluded on a course of action ; "I've been turning that here over."

"Captain Gills, it's very kind of you," reported Mr. Toots. "I'm much obliged to you. Upon my word and honour, Captain Gills, it would be a charity to give me the pleasure of your acquaintance. It really would."

"You see, brother," argued the captain slowly, "I don't know you."

"But you never *can* know me, Captain Gills," replied Mr. Toots, steadfast to his point, "if you don't give me the pleasure of your acquaintance."

The captain seemed struck by the originality and power of this remark, and looked at Mr. Toots as if he thought there was a great deal more in him than he had expected.

"Well said, my lad," observed the captain,

nodding his head thoughtfully ; "and true. Now look here. You've made some observations to me, which gives me to understand as you admire a certain sweet creature. Hey?"

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, gesticulating violently with the hand in which he held his hat, "admiration is not the word. Upon my honour, you have no conception what my feelings are. If I could be dyed black, and made Miss Dombey's slave, I should consider it a compliment. If, at the sacrifice of all my property, I could get transmigrated into Miss Dombey's dog—I—I really think I should never leave off wagging my tail. I should be so perfectly happy, Captain Gills!"

Mr. Toots said it with watery eyes, and pressed his hat against his bosom with deep emotion.

"My lad," returned the captain, moved to compassion, "if you're in earnest——"

"Captain Gills," cried Mr. Toots, "I'm in such a state of mind, and am so dreadfully in earnest, that if I could swear to it upon a hot piece of iron, or a live coal, or melted lead, or burning sealing-wax, or anything of that sort, I should be glad to hurt myself, as a relief to my feelings." And Mr. Toots looked hurriedly about the room, as if for some sufficiently painful means of accomplishing his dread purpose.

The captain pushed his glazed hat back upon his head, stroked his face down with his heavy hand—making his nose more mottled in the process—and planting himself before Mr. Toots, and hooking him by the lappel of his coat, addressed him in these words, while Mr. Toots looked up into his face with much attention and some wonder.

"If you're in earnest, you see, my lad," said the captain, "you're a object of clemency, and clemency is the brightest jewel in the crown of a Briton's head, for which you'll overhaul the constitution, as laid down in Rule Britannia, and, when found, *that* is the charter as them garden angels was a singing of, so many times over. Stand by ! This here proposal o' yours takes me a little aback. And why ? Because I holds my own only, you understand, in these here waters, and haven't got no consort, and maybe don't wish for none. Steady ! You hailed me first, along of a certain young lady as you was chartered by. Now, if you and me is to keep one another's company at all, that there young creature's name must never be named nor referred to. I don't know what harm mayn't have been done by naming of it too free afore now, and thereby I brings up short. D'ye make me out pretty clear, brother?"

"Well, you'll excuse me, Captain Gills," replied Mr. Toots, "if I don't quite follow you, sometimes. But upon my word I—— It's a hard thing, Captain Gills, not to be able to mention Miss Dombey. I really have got such

a dreadful load here"—Mr. Toots pathetically touched his shirt-front with both hands—"that I feel, night and day, exactly as if somebody was sitting upon me."

"Them," said the captain. "is the terms I



"RAN SNIGGERING OFF TO GET CHANGE, AND TOSSED IT AWAY WITH A PIEMAN."

offer. If they're hard upon you, brother, as mayhap, they are, give 'em a wide berth, sheer off, and part company cheerily!"

"Captain Gills," returned Mr. Toots, "I hardly know how it is, but after what you told me when I came here for the first time, I—I feel that I'd rather think about Miss Dombey in

your society than talk about her in almost anybody else's. Therefore, Captain Gills, if you'll give me the pleasure of your acquaintance, I shall be very happy to accept it on your own conditions. I wish to be honourable, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, holding back his extended hand for a moment, "and therefore I am

obliged to say that I *can not* help thinking about Miss Dombey. It's impossible for me to make a promise not to think about her."

"My lad," said the captain, whose opinion of Mr. Toots was much improved by this candid avowal, "a man's thoughts is like the winds, and nobody can't answer for 'em for certain, any length of time together. Is it a treaty as to words?"

"As to words, Captain Gills," returned Mr. Toots, "I think I can bind myself."

Mr. Toots gave Captain Cuttle his hand upon it, then and there; and the captain, with a pleasant and gracious show of condescension, bestowed his acquaintance upon him formally. Mr. Toots seemed much relieved and gladdened by the acquisition, and chuckled rapturously during the remainder of his visit. The captain, for his part, was not ill pleased to occupy that position of patronage, and was exceedingly well satisfied by his own prudence and foresight.

But rich as Captain Cuttle was in the latter quality, he received a surprise that same evening from a no less ingenuous and simple youth than Rob the Grinder. That artless lad, drinking tea at the same table, and bending meekly over his cup and saucer, having taken sidelong observations of his master for some time, who was reading the newspaper with great difficulty, but much dignity, through his glasses, broke silence by saying—

"Oh! I beg your pardon, captain, but you mayn't be in want of any pigeons, may you, sir?"

"No, my lad," replied the captain.

"Because I was wishing to dispose of mine, captain," said Rob.

"Ay, ay?" cried the captain, lifting up his bushy eyebrows a little.

"Yes; I'm going, captain, if you please," said Rob.

"Going! Where are you going?" asked the captain, looking round at him over the glasses.

"What! didn't you know that I was going to leave you, captain?" asked Rob with a sneaking smile.

The captain put down the paper, took off his spectacles, and brought his eyes to bear on the deserter.

"Oh yes, captain, I am going to give you warning. I thought you'd have known that beforehand, perhaps," said Rob, rubbing his hands, and getting up. "If you could be so good as provide yourself soon, captain, it would be a great convenience to me. You couldn't provide yourself by to-morrow morning, I am afraid, captain; could you, do you think?"

"And you're a-going to desert your colours, are you, my lad?" said the captain, after a long examination of his face.

"Oh, it's very hard upon a cove, captain," cried the tender Rob, injured and indignant in a moment, "that he can't give lawful warning, without being frowned at in that way, and called a deserter. You haven't any right to call a poor cove names, captain. It an't because I'm a servant, and you're a master, that you're to go and libel me. What wrong have I done? Come, captain, let me know what my crime is, will you?"

The stricken Grinder wept, and put his coat-cuff in his eye.

"Come, captain," cried the injured youth, "give my crime a name! What have I been and done? Have I stolen any of the property? Have I set the house afire? If I have, why don't you give me in charge, and try it? But to take away the character of a lad that's been a good servant to you, because he can't afford to stand in his own light for your good, what a injury it is, and what a bad return for faithful service! This is the way young coves is spiled and drove wrong. I wonder at you, captain, I do."

All of which the Grinder howled forth in a lachrymose whine, and backing carefully towards the door.

"And so you've got another berth, have you, my lad?" said the captain, eyeing him intently.

"Yes, captain, since you put it in that shape, I *have* got another berth," cried Rob, backing more and more; "a better berth than I've got here, and one where I don't so much as want your good word, captain, which is fort'nate for me, after all the dirt you've throw'd at me, because I'm poor, and can't afford to stand in my own light for your good. Yes, I *have* got another berth; and if it wasn't for leaving you unprovided, captain, I'd go to it now, sooner than I'd take them names from you, because I'm poor, and can't afford to stand in my own light for your good. Why do you reproach me for being poor, and not standing in my own light for your good, captain? How can you so demean yourself?"

"Look ye here, my boy," replied the peaceful captain. "Don't you pay out no more of them words."

"Well, then, don't you pay in no more of your words, captain," retorted the roused innocent, getting louder in his whine, and backing into the shop. "I'd sooner you took my blood than my character."

"Because," pursued the captain calmly, "you

have heerd, maybe, of such a thing as a rope's end."

"Oh, have I thought, captain?" cried the taunting Grinder. "No, I haven't. I never heerd of any such a article!"

"Well," said the captain, "it's my belief as you'll know more 'bout it pretty soon, if you don't keep a bright look-out. I can read your signals, my lad. You may go."

"Oh! I may go at once, may I, captain?" cried Rob, exulting in his success. "But mind! I never asked to go at once, captain. You are not to take away my character again, because you send me off of your own accord. And you're not to stop any of my wages, captain!"

His employer settled the last point by producing the tin canister, and telling the Grinder's money out in full upon the table. Rob, snivelling and sobbing, and grievously wounded in his feelings, took up the pieces one by one, with a sob and a snivel for each, and tied them up separately in knots in his pocket-handkerchief; then he ascended to the roof of the house, and filled his hat and pockets with pigeons; then, came down to his bed under the counter and made up his bundle, snivelling and sobbing louder, as if he were cut to the heart by old associations; then he whined, "Good night, captain; I leave you without malice!" and then, going out upon the door-step, pulled the little Midshipman's nose as a parting indignity, and went away down the street grinning triumph.

The captain, left to himself, resumed his perusal of the news as if nothing unusual or unexpected had taken place, and went reading on with the greatest assiduity. But never a word did Captain Cuttle understand, though he read a vast number, for Rob the Grinder was scampering up one column and down another all through the newspaper.

It is doubtful whether the worthy captain had ever felt himself quite abandoned until now; but now, old Sol Gills, Walter, and Heart's Delight were lost to him indeed, and now Mr. Carker deceived and jeered him cruelly. They were all represented in the false Rob, to whom he had held forth many a time on the recollections that were warm within him; he had believed in the false Rob, and had been glad to believe in him; he had made a companion of him, as the last of the old ship's company; he had taken the command of the little Midshipman with him at his right hand; he had meant to do his duty by him, and had felt almost as kindly towards the boy as if they had been shipwrecked and cast upon a desert place together. And now that the false Rob had brought dis-

trust, treachery, and meanness into the very parlour, which was a kind of sacred place, Captain Cuttle felt as if the parlour might have gone down next, and not surprised him much by its sinking, or given him any very great concern.

Therefore Captain Cuttle read the newspaper with profound attention and no comprehension, and therefore Captain Cuttle said nothing whatever about Rob to himself, or admitted to himself that he was thinking about him, or would recognise in the most distant manner that Rob had anything to do with his feeling as lonely as Robinson Crusoe.

In the same composed, business-like way the captain stepped over to Leadenhall Market in the dusk, and effected an arrangement with a private watchman on duty there, to come and put up and take down the shutters of the Wooden Midshipman every night and morning. He then called in at the eating-house to diminish by one-half the daily rations theretofore supplied to the Midshipman, and at the public-house to stop the traitor's beer. "My young man," said the captain, in explanation to the young lady at the bar, "my young man having bettered himself, miss." Lastly, the captain resolved to take possession of the bed under the counter, and to turn in there o' nights instead of up-stairs, as sole guardian of the property.

From this bed Captain Cuttle daily rose thenceforth, and clapped on his glazed hat at six o'clock in the morning, with the solitary air of Crusoe finishing his toilet with his goat-skin cap; and although his fears of a visitation from the savage tribe, MacStinger, were somewhat cooled, as similar apprehensions on the part of that lone mariner used to be by the lapse of a long interval without any symptoms of the cannibals, he still observed a regular routine of defensive operations, and never encountered a bonnet without previous survey from his castle of retreat. In the meantime (during which he received no call from Mr. Toots, who wrote to say he was out of town) his own voice began to have a strange sound in his ears: and he acquired such habits of profound meditation from much polishing and stowing away of the stock, and from much sitting behind the counter reading, or looking out of window, that the red rim made on his forehead by the hard glazed hat sometimes ached again with excess of reflection.

The year being now expired, Captain Cuttle deemed it expedient to open the packet; but, as he had always designed doing this in the presence of Rob the Grinder, who had brought it to him, and as he had an idea that it would be regular and ship-shape to open it in the presence

of somebody, he was sadly put to it for want of a witness. In this difficulty, he hailed one day with unusual delight the announcement in the Shipping Intelligence of the arrival of the Cautious Clara, Captain John Bunsby, from a coasting voyage; and to that philosopher immediately dispatched a letter by post, enjoining inviolable secrecy as to his place of residence, and requesting to be favoured with an early visit in the evening season.

Bunsby, who was one of those sages who act upon conviction, took some days to get the conviction thoroughly into his mind, that he had received a letter to this effect. But, when he had grappled with the fact and mastered it, he promptly sent his boy with the message, "He's a-coming to-night." Who, being instructed to deliver those words and disappear, fulfilled his mission like a tarry spirit charged with mysterious warning.

The captain, well pleased to receive it, made preparation of pipes and rum-and-water, and awaited his visitor in the back-parlour. At the hour of eight, a deep lowing, as of a nautical bell, outside the shop-door, succeeded by the knocking of a stick on the panel, announced to the listening ear of Captain Cuttle that Bunsby was alongside; whom he instantly admitted, shaggy and loose, and with his stolid mahogany visage, as usual, appearing to have no consciousness of anything before it, but to be attentively observing something that was taking place in quite another part of the world.

"Bunsby," said the captain, grasping him by the hand, "what cheer, my lad, what cheer?"

"Shipmet," replied the voice within Bunsby, unaccompanied by any sign on the part of the commander himself, "hearty, hearty."

"Bunsby!" said the captain, rendering irrepressible homage to his genius, "here you are! a man as can give an opinion as is brighter than di'monds—and give me the lad with the tarry trousers as shines to me like di'monds bright, for which you'll overhaul the Stanfell's Budget, and when found make a note. Here you are, a man as gave an opinion in this here very place, that has come true, every letter on it," which the captain sincerely believed.

"Ay, ay!" growled Bunsby.

"Every letter," said the captain.

"For why?" growled Bunsby, looking at his friend for the first time. "Which way? If so, why not? Therefore."

With these oracular words—they seemed almost to make the captain giddy; they launched him upon such a sea of speculation and conjecture—the sage submitted to be helped off with

his pilot coat, and accompanied his friend into the back-parlour, where his hand presently alighted on the rum-bottle, from which he brewed a stiff glass of grog; and presently afterwards on a pipe, which he filled, lighted, and began to smoke.

Captain Cuttle, imitating his visitor in the matter of these particulars, though the rapt and imperturbable manner of the great commander was far above his powers, sat in the opposite corner of the fireside, observing him respectfully, and as if he waited for some encouragement or expression of curiosity on Bunsby's part which should lead him to his own affairs. But as the mahogany philosopher gave no evidence of being sentient of anything but warmth and tobacco, except once, when, taking his pipe from his lips to make room for his glass, he incidentally remarked, with exceeding gruffness, that his name was Jack Bunsby—a declaration that presented but small opening for conversation—the captain, bespeaking his attention in a short complimentary exordium, narrated the whole history of Uncle Sol's departure, with the change it had produced in his own life and fortunes; and concluded by placing the packet on the table.

After a long pause Mr. Bunsby nodded his head.

"Open?" said the captain.

Bunsby nodded again.

The captain accordingly broke the seal, and disclosed to view two folded papers, of which he severally read the indorsements, thus: "Last Will and Testament of Solomon Gills." "Letter for Ned Cuttle."

Bunsby, with his eye on the coast of Greenland, seemed to listen for the contents. The captain therefore hemmed to clear his throat, and read the letter aloud.

"My dear Ned Cuttle. When I left home for the West Indies——"

Here the captain stopped, and looked hard at Bunsby, who looked fixedly at the coast of Greenland.

"—In forlorn search of intelligence of my dear boy, I knew that, if you were acquainted with my design, you would thwart it, or accompany me; and therefore I kept it secret. If you ever read this letter, Ned, I am likely to be dead. You will easily forgive an old friend's folly then, and will feel for the restlessness and uncertainty in which he wandered away on such a wild voyage. So no more of that. I have little hope that my poor boy will ever read these words, or gladden your eyes with the sight of his frank face any more." No, no; no more," said Captain Cuttle, sorrowfully meditating; "no more. There he lays, all his days——"

Mr. Bunsby, who had a musical ear, suddenly bellowed, "In the Bays of Biscay, O!" which so affected the good captain, as an appropriate tribute to departed worth, that he shook him by the hand in acknowledgment, and was fain to wipe his eyes.

"Well, well!" said the captain with a sigh, as the lament of Bunsby ceased to ring and vibrate in the sky-light. "Affliction sore, long time he bore, and let us overhaul the wollume, and there find it."

"Physicians," observed Bunsby, "was in vain."

"Ay, ay, to be sure," said the captain; "what's the good o' *them* in two or three hundred fathom o' water?" Then, returning to the letter, he read on:—"But if he should be by when it is opened;" the captain involuntarily looked round, and shook his head; "'or should know of it at any other time;" the captain shook his head again; "'my blessing on him! In case the accompanying paper is not legally written, it matters very little, for there is no one interested but you and he, and my plain wish is, that if he is living he should have what little there may be,



"AND YOU'RE A-GOING TO DESERT YOUR COLOURS, ARE YOU, MY LAD?" SAID THE CAPTAIN, AFTER A LONG EXAMINATION OF HIS FACE.

and if (as I fear) otherwise, that you should have it, Ned. You will respect my wish, I know. God bless you for it, and for all your friendliness, besides, to SOLOMON GILLS.' Bunsby!" said the captain, appealing to him solemnly, "what do you make of this? There you sit, a man as has had his head broke from infancy up'ards, and has got a new opinion into it at every seam as has been opened. Now, what do you make o' this?"

"If so be," returned Bunsby with unusual promptitude, "as he's dead, my opinion is he

won't come back no more. If so be as he's alive, my opinion is he will. Do I say he will? No. Why not? Because the bearings of this obserbation lays in the application on it."

"Bunsby!" said Captain Cuttle, who would seem to have estimated the value of his distinguished friend's opinions in proportion to the immensity of the difficulty he experienced in making anything out of them; "Bunsby," said the captain, quite confounded by admiration, "you carry a weight of mind easy, as would swamp one of my tonnage soon. But, in regard

o' this here will, I don't mean to take no steps towards the property—Lord forbid!—except to keep it for a more rightful owner; and I hope yet as the rightful owner, Sol Gills, is living and 'll come back, strange as it is that he ain't forwarded no dispatches. Now, what is your opinion, Bunsby, as to stowing of these here papers away again, and marking outside as they was opened, such a day, in presence of John Bunsby and Ed'ard Cuttle?"

Bunsby, describing no objection, on the coast of Greenland or elsewhere, to this proposal, it was carried into execution; and that great man, bringing his eye into the present for a moment, affixed his sign-manual to the cover, totally abstaining, with characteristic modesty, from the use of capital letters. Captain Cuttle, having attached his own left-handed signature, and locked up the packet in the iron safe, entreated his guest to mix another glass and smoke another pipe; and doing the like himself, fell a musing over the fire on the possible fortunes of the poor old instrument-maker.

And now a surprise occurred, so overwhelming and terrific that Captain Cuttle, unsupported by the presence of Bunsby, must have sunk beneath it, and been a lost man from that fatal hour.

How the captain, even in the satisfaction of admitting such a guest, could have only shut the door and not locked it, of which negligence he was undoubtedly guilty, is one of those questions that must for ever remain mere points of speculation, or vague charges against destiny. But, by that unlocked door, at this quiet moment, did the fell MacStinger dash into the parlour, bringing Alexander MacStinger in her parental arms, and confusion and vengeance (not to mention Juliana MacStinger, and the sweet child's brother, Charles MacStinger, popularly known about the scenes of his youthful sports as Chowley) in her train. She came so swiftly and so silently, like a rushing air from the neighbourhood of the East India Docks, that Captain Cuttle found himself in the very act of sitting looking at her, before the calm face with which he had been meditating changed to one of horror and dismay.

But, the moment Captain Cuttle understood the full extent of his misfortune, self-preservation dictated an attempt at flight. Darting at the little door which opened from the parlour on the steep little range of cellar steps, the captain made a rush, head foremost, at the latter, like a man indifferent to bruises and contusions, who only sought to hide himself in the bowels of the earth. In this gallant effort he would probably

have succeeded, but for the affectionate dispositions of Juliana and Chowley, who, pinning him by the legs—one of those dear children holding on to each—claimed him as their friend, with lamentable cries. In the meantime, Mrs. MacStinger, who never entered upon any action of importance without previously inverting Alexander MacStinger, to bring him within the range of a brisk battery of slaps, and then sitting him down to cool as the reader first beheld him, performed that solemn rite, as if on this occasion it were a sacrifice to the Furies; and, having deposited the victim on the floor, made at the captain with a strength of purpose that appeared to threaten scratches to the interposing Bunsby.

The cries of the two elder MacStingers, and the wailing of young Alexander, who may be said to have passed a piebald childhood, forasmuch as he was black in the face during one half of that fairy period of existence, combined to make this visitation the more awful. But when silence reigned again, and the captain, in a violent perspiration, stood meekly looking at Mrs. MacStinger, its terrors were at their height. "Oh, Cap'en Cuttle, Cap'en Cuttle!" said Mrs. MacStinger, making her chin rigid, and shaking it in unison with what, but for the weakness of her sex, might be described as her fist. "Oh, Cap'en Cuttle, Cap'en Cuttle, do you dare to look me in the face, and not be struck down in the herth?"

The captain, who looked anything but daring, feebly muttered, "Stand by!"

"Oh, I was a weak and trusting fool when I took you under *my* roof, Cap'en Cuttle, I was!" cried Mrs. MacStinger. "To think of the benefits I've showered on that man, and the way in which I brought my children up to love and honor him as if he was a father to 'em, when there an't a 'ousekeeper, no, nor a lodger in our street, don't know that I lost money by that man, and by his guzzlings and his muzzlings!"—Mrs. MacStinger used the last word for the joint sake of alliteration and aggravation, rather than for the expression of any idea—"and when they cried out one and all, shame upon him for putting upon an industrious woman, up early and late for the good of her young family, and keeping her poor place so clean that a individual might have ate his dinner, yes, and his tea too, if he was so disposed, off any one of the floors or stairs, in spite of all his guzzlings and his muzzlings, such was the care and pains bestowed upon him!"

Mrs. MacStinger stopped to fetch her breath; and her face flushed with triumph in this second happy introduction of Captain Cuttle's muzzlings.

"And he runs awa-a-a-ay!" cried Mrs. MacStinger, with a lengthening out of the last syllable that made the unfortunate captain regard himself as the meanest of men; "and keeps away a twelvemonth! From a woman! Sitch is his conscience! He hasn't the courage to meet her hi-i-igh!" long syllable again; "but steals away like a felon. Why, if that baby of mine," said Mrs. MacStinger with sudden rapidity, "was to offer to go and steal away, I'd do my duty as a mother by him, till he was covered with wales!"

The young Alexander, interpreting this into a positive promise, to be shortly redeemed, tumbled over with fear and grief, and lay upon the floor, exhibiting the soles of his shoes, and making such a deafening outcry, that Mrs. MacStinger found it necessary to take him up in her arms, where she quieted him, ever and anon, as he broke out again, by a shake that seemed enough to loosen his teeth.

"A pretty sort of a man is Cap'en Cuttle," said Mrs. MacStinger, with a sharp stress on the first syllable of the captain's name, "to take on for—and to lose sleep for, and to faint along of—and to think dead forsooth—and to go up and down the blessed town like a madwoman, asking questions after! Oh, a pretty sort of a man! Ha, ha, ha, ha! He's worth all that trouble and distress of mind, and much more. *That's* nothing, bless you! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Cap'en Cuttle," said Mrs. MacStinger, with severe reaction in her voice and manner, "I wish to know if you're a-coming home?"

The frightened captain looked into his hat, as if he saw nothing for it but to put it on, and give himself up.

"Cap'en Cuttle," repeated Mrs. MacStinger in the same determined manner, "I wish to know if you're a-coming home, sir?"

The captain seemed quite ready to go, but faintly suggested something to the effect of "not making so much nise about it."

"Ay, ay, ay!" said Bunsby in a soothing tone. "Awast, my lass, awast!"

"And who may you be, if you please?" retorted Mrs. MacStinger with chaste loftiness. "Did you ever lodge at Number Nine, Brig Place, sir? My memory may be bad, but not with me, I think. There was a Mrs. Jollson lived at Number Nine before me, and perhaps you're mistaking me for her. That is my only ways of accounting for your familiarity, sir."

"Come, come, my lass, awast, awast," said Bunsby.

Captain Cuttle could hardly believe it, even of this great man, though he saw it done with his waking eyes; but Bunsby, advancing boldly,

put his shaggy blue arm round Mrs. MacStinger, and so softened her by his magic way of doing it, and by these few words—he said no more—that she melted into tears after looking upon him for a few moments, and observed that a child might conquer her now. she was so low in her courage.

Speechless and utterly amazed, the captain saw him gradually persuade this inexorable woman into the shop, return for rum-and-water and a candle, take them to her, and pacify her without appearing to utter one word. Presently he looked in with his pilot coat on, and said, "Cuttle, I'm a-going to act as convoy home;" and Captain Cuttle, more to his confusion than if he had been put in irons himself for safe transport to Brig Place, saw the family pacifically filing off, with Mrs. MacStinger at their head. He had scarcely time to take down his canister, and stealthily convey some money into the hands of Juliana MacStinger, his former favourite, and Chowley, who had the claim upon him that he was naturally of a maritime build, before the Midshipman was abandoned by them all; and Bunsby whispering that he'd carry on smart, and hail Ned Cuttle again before he went aboard, shut the door upon himself, as the last member of the party.

Some uneasy ideas that he must be walking in his sleep, or that he had been troubled with phantoms, and not a family of flesh and blood, beset the captain at first, when he went back to the little parlour, and found himself alone. Illimitable faith in, and immeasurable admiration of, the commander of the Cautious Clara, succeeded, and threw the captain into a wondering trance.

Still, as time wore on, and Bunsby failed to reappear, the captain began to entertain uncomfortable doubts of another kind. Whether Bunsby had been artfully decoyed to Brig Place, and was there detained in safe custody as hostage for his friend; in which case it would become the captain, as a man of honour, to release him by the sacrifice of his own liberty. Whether he had been attacked and defeated by Mrs. MacStinger, and was ashamed to show himself after his discomfiture. Whether Mrs. MacStinger, thinking better of it, in the uncertainty of her temper, had turned back to board the Midshipman again, and Bunsby, pretending to conduct her by a short cut, was endeavouring to lose the family amid the wilds and savage places of the city. Above all, what it would behove him, Captain Cuttle, to do, in case of his hearing no more either of the MacStingers or of Bunsby, which, in these wonderful and unfore-

seen conjunctions of events, might possibly happen.

He debated all this until he was tired; and still no Bunsby. He made up his bed under the counter, all ready for turning in; still no Bunsby. At length, when the captain had given him up, for that night, at least, and had begun to undress, the sound of approaching wheels was heard, and, stopping at the door, was succeeded by Bunsby's hail.

The captain trembled to think that Mrs. MacStinger was not to be got rid of, and had been brought back in a coach.

But no. Bunsby was accompanied by nothing but a large box, which he hauled into the shop with his own hands, and as soon as he had hauled in, sat upon. Captain Cuttle knew it for the chest he had left at Mrs. MacStinger's house, and looking, candle in hand, at Bunsby more attentively, believed that he was three sheets in the wind; or, in plain words, drunk. It was difficult, however, to be sure of this; the commander having no trace of expression in his face when sober.

"Cuttle," said the commander, getting off the chest, and opening the lid, "are these here your traps?"

Captain Cuttle looked in and identified his property.

"Done pretty taut and trim, hey, shipmet?" said Bunsby.

The grateful and bewildered captain grasped him by the hand, and was launching into a reply expressive of his astonished feelings, when Bunsby disengaged himself by a jerk of his wrist, and seemed to make an effort to wink with his revolving eye, the only effect of which attempt, in his condition, was nearly to overbalance him. He then abruptly opened the door, and shot away to rejoin the Cautious Clara with all speed—supposed to be his invariable custom, whenever he considered he had made a point.

As it was not his humour to be often sought, Captain Cuttle decided not to go or send to him next day; or until he should make his gracious pleasure known in such wise, or, failing that, until some little time should have elapsed. The captain, therefore, renewed his solitary life next morning, and thought profoundly, many mornings, noons, and nights, of old Sol Gills, and Bunsby's sentiments concerning him, and the hopes there were of his return. Much of such thinking strengthened Captain Cuttle's hopes; and he humoured them and himself by watching for the instrument-maker at the door, as he ventured to do now, in his strange liberty—and setting his chair in its place, and arranging the

little parlour as it used to be, in case he should come home unexpectedly. He likewise, in his thoughtfulness, took down a certain little miniature of Walter as a school-boy from its accursed nail, lest it should shock the old man on his return. The captain had his presentiments, too; sometimes, that he would come on such a day; and one particular Sunday, even ordered a double allowance of dinner, he was so sanguine. But come old Solomon did not. And still the neighbours noticed how the seafaring man in the glazed hat stood at the shop-door of an evening, looking up and down the street.

CHAPTER XL.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS.



IT was not in the nature of things that a man of Mr. Dombey's mood, opposed to such a spirit as he had raised against himself, should be softened in the imperious asperity of his temper; or that the cold, hard armour of pride, in which he lived encased, should be made more flexible by constant collision with haughty scorn and defiance. It is the curse of such a nature—it is a main part of the heavy retribution on itself it bears within itself—that while deference and concession swell its evil qualities, and are the food it grows upon, resistance, and a questioning of its exacting claims, foster it too, no less. The evil that is in it finds equally its means of growth and propagation in opposites. It draws support and life from sweets and bitters: bowed down before, or unacknowledged, it still enslaves the breast in which it has its throne; and, worshipped or rejected, is as hard a master as the Devil in dark fables.

Towards his first wife, Mr. Dombey, in his cold and lofty arrogance, had borne himself like the removed being he almost conceived himself to be. He had been "Mr. Dombey" with her, when she first saw him, and he was "Mr. Dombey" when she died. He had asserted his greatness during their whole married life, and she had meekly recognised it. He had kept his distant seat of state on the top of his throne, and she her humble station on its lowest step; and much good it had done him, so to live in solitary bondage to his one idea. He had imagined that the proud character of his second wife would have been added to his own—would have

merged into it, and exalted his greatness. He had pictured himself haughtier than ever, with Edith's haughtiness subservient to his. He had never entertained the possibility of its arraying itself against him. And now, when he found it rising in his path at every step and turn of his daily life, fixing its cold, defiant, and contemptuous face upon him, this pride of his, instead of withering, or hanging down its head beneath the shock, put forth new shoots, became more concentrated and intense, more gloomy, sullen, irksome, and unyielding, than it had ever been before.

Who wears such armour, too, bears with him ever another heavy retribution. It is of proof against conciliation, love, and confidence; against all gentle sympathy from without, all trust, all tenderness, all soft emotion; but, to deep stabs in the self-love, it is as vulnerable as the bare breast to steel; and such tormenting festers rankle there as follow on no other wounds, no, though dealt with the mailed hand of pride itself, on weaker pride, disarmed and thrown down.

Such wounds were his. He felt them sharply, in the solitude of his old rooms; whither he now began often to retire again, and pass long solitary hours. It seemed his fate to be ever proud and powerful; ever humbled and powerless where he would be most strong. Who seemed ~~fixed~~ to work out that doom?

Who? Who was it who could win his wife as she had won his boy? Who was it who had shown him that new victory, as he sat in the dark corner? Who was it whose least word did what his utmost means could not? Who was it who, unaided by his love, regard, or notice, thrived and grew beautiful when those so aided died? Who could it be, but the same child at whom he had often glanced uneasily in her motherless infancy, with a kind of dread lest he might come to hate her; and of whom his foreboding was fulfilled, for he did hate her in his heart?

Yes, and he would have it hatred, and he made it hatred, though some sparkles of the light in which she had appeared before him, on the memorable night of his return home with his bride, occasionally hung about her still. He knew now that she was beautiful; he did not dispute that she was graceful and winning, and that in the bright dawn of her womanhood she had come upon him, a surprise. But he turned even this against her. In his sullen and unwholesome brooding, the unhappy man, with a dull perception of his alienation from all hearts, and a vague yearning for what he had all his

life repelled, made a distorted picture of his rights and wrongs, and justified himself with it against her. The worthier she promised to be of him, the greater claim he was disposed to ante-date upon her duty and submission. When had she ever shown him duty and submission? Did she grace his life—or Edith's? Had her attractions been manifested first to him—or Edith? Why, he and she had never been, from her birth, like father and child! They had always been estranged. She had crossed him every way and everywhere. She was leagued against him now. Her very beauty softened natures that were obdurate to him, and insulted him with an unnatural triumph.

It may have been that in all this there were mutterings of an awakened feeling in his breast, however selfishly aroused by his position of disadvantage, in comparison with what she might have made his life. But he silenced the distant thunder with the rolling of his sea of pride. He would bear nothing but his pride. And in his pride, a heap of inconsistency, and misery, and self-inflicted torment, he hated her.

To the moody, stubborn, sullen demon that possessed him, his wife opposed her different pride in its full force. They never could have led a happy life together; but nothing could have made it more unhappy than the willful and determined warfare of such elements. His pride was set upon maintaining his magnificent supremacy, and forcing recognition of it from her. She would have been racked to death, and turned but her haughty glance of calm, inflexible disdain upon him to the last. Such recognition from Edith! He little knew through what a storm and struggle she had been driven onward to the crowning honour of his hand. He little knew how much she thought she had conceded when she suffered him to call her wife.

Mr. Dombey was resolved to show her that he was supreme. There must be no will but his. Proud he desired that she should be, but she must be proud for, not against him. As he sat alone, hardening, he would often hear her go out and come home, treading the round of London life with no more heed of his liking or disliking, pleasure or displeasure, than if he had been her groom. Her cold, supreme indifference—his own unquestioned attribute usurped—stung him more than any other kind of treatment could have done; and he determined to bend her to his magnificent and stately will.

He had been long communing with these thoughts, when one night he sought her in her own apartment, after he had heard her return home late. She was alone, in her brilliant dress,

and had but that moment come from her mother's room. Her face was melancholy and pensive when he came upon her; but it marked him at the door; for, glancing at the mirror before it, he saw immediately, as in a picture-frame, the knitted brow and darkened beauty that he knew so well.

"Mrs. Dombey," he said, entering, "I must beg leave to have a few words with you."

"To-morrow," she replied.

"There is no time like the present, madam," he returned. "You mistake your position. I am used to choose my own times; not to have them chosen for me. I think you scarcely understand who and what I am, Mrs. Dombey."

"I think," she answered, "that I understand you very well."

She looked upon him as she said so, and folding her white arms, sparkling with gold and gems, upon her swelling breast, turned away her eyes.

If she had been less handsome, and less stately in her cold composure, she might not have had the power of impressing him with the sense of disadvantage that penetrated through his utmost pride. But she had the power, and he felt it keenly. He glanced round the room: saw how the splendid means of personal adornment, and the luxuries of dress, were scattered here and there, and disregarded; not in mere caprice and carelessness (or so he thought), but in a steadfast, haughty disregard of costly things: and felt it more and more. Chaplets of flowers, plumes of feathers, jewels, laces, silks and satins; look where he would, he saw riches despised, poured out, and made of no account. The very diamonds—a marriage gift—that rose and fell impatiently upon her bosom, seemed to pant to break the chain that clasped them round her neck, and roll down on the floor where she might tread upon them.

He felt his disadvantage, and he showed it. Solemn and strange among this wealth of colour and voluptuous glitter, strange and constrained towards its haughty mistress, whose repellent beauty it repeated, and presented all around him, as in so many fragments of a mirror, he was conscious of embarrassment and awkwardness. Nothing that ministered to her disdainful self-possession could fail to gail him. Galled and irritated with himself, he sat down, and went on in no improved humour:

"Mrs. Dombey, it is very necessary that there should be some understanding arrived at between us. Your conduct does not please me, madam."

She merely glanced at him again, and again

averted her eyes; but she might have spoken for an hour, and expressed less.

"I repeat, Mrs. Dombey, does not please me. I have already taken occasion to request that it may be corrected. I now insist upon it."

"You chose a fitting occasion for your first remonstrance, sir, and you adopt a fitting manner and a fitting word for your second. *You insist! To me!*"

"Madam," said Mr. Dombey with his most offensive air of state, "I have made you my wife. You bear my name. You are associated with my position and my reputation. I will not say that the world in general may be disposed to think you honoured by that association; but I will say that I am accustomed to 'insist' to my connections and dependants."

"Which may you be pleased to consider me?" she asked.

"Possibly I may think that my wife should partake—or does partake, and cannot help herself—of both characters, Mrs. Dombey."

She bent her eyes upon him steadily, and set her trembling lips. He saw her bosom throb, and saw her face flush and turn white. All this he could know, and did: but he could not know that one word was whispering in the deep recesses of her heart, to keep her quiet; and that the word was Florence.

Blind idiot, rushing to a precipice! He thought she stood in awe of him!

"You are too expensive, madam," said Mr. Dombey. "You are extravagant. You waste a great deal of money—or what would be a great deal in the pockets of most gentlemen—in cultivating a kind of society that is useless to me, and, indeed, that upon the whole is disagreeable to me. I have to insist upon a total change in all these respects. I know that, in the novelty of possessing a tithe of such means as fortune has placed at your disposal, ladies are apt to run into a sudden extreme. There has been more than enough of that extreme. I beg that Mrs. Granger's very different experiences may now come to the instruction of Mrs. Dombey."

Still the fixed look, the trembling lips, the throbbing breast, the face now crimson and now white; and still the deep whisper Florence, Florence, speaking to her in the beating of her heart.

His insolence of self-importance dilated as he saw this alteration in her. Swollen no less by her past scorn of him, and his so recent feeling of disadvantage, than by her present submission (as he took it to be), it became too mighty for his breast, and burst all bounds. Why, who could long resist his lofty will and plea-

sure? He had resolved to conquer her, and look here!

"You will further please, madam," said Mr. Dombey in a tone of sovereign command, "to understand distinctly, that I am to be deferred to and obeyed. That I must have a positive show and confession of deference before the world, madam. I am used to this. I require it as my right. In short, I will have it. I consider it no unreasonable return for the worldly advancement that has befallen you; and I believe nobody will be surprised, either at its being required from you, or at your making it.—To me—to me!" he added with emphasis.

No word from her. No change in her. Her eyes upon him.

"I have learnt from your mother, Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey with magisterial importance, "what no doubt you know, namely, that Brighton is recommended for her health. Mr. Carker has been so good——"

She changed suddenly. Her face and bosom glowed as if the red light of an angry sunset had been flung upon them. Not unobservant of the change, and putting his own interpretation upon it, Mr. Dombey resumed:

"Mr. Carker has been so good as to go down and secure a house there for a time. On the return of the establishment to London, I shall take such steps for its better management as I consider necessary. One of these will be the engagement at Brighton (if it is to be effected), of a very respectable reduced person there, a Mrs. Pipchin, formerly employed in a situation of trust in my family, to act as housekeeper. An establishment like this, presided over but nominally, Mrs. Dombey, requires a competent head."

She had changed her attitude before he arrived at these words, and now sat—still looking at him fixedly—turning a bracelet round and round upon her arm; not winding it about with a light, womanly touch, but pressing and dragging it over the smooth skin, until the white limb showed a bar of red.

"I observed," said Mr. Dombey—"and this concludes what I deem it necessary to say to you at present, Mrs. Dombey—I observed a moment ago, madam, that my allusion to Mr. Carker was received in a peculiar manner. On the occasion of my happening to point out to you, before that confidential agent, the objection I had to your mode of receiving my visitors, you were pleased to object to his presence. You will have to get the better of that objection, madam, and to accustom yourself to it, very probably, on many similar occasions; unless you adopt the remedy which is in your own hands,

of giving me no cause of complaint. Mr. Carker," said Mr. Dombey, who, after the emotion he had just seen, set great store by this means of reducing his proud wife, and who was perhaps sufficiently willing to exhibit his power to that gentleman in a new and triumphant aspect, "Mr. Carker being in my confidence, Mrs. Dombey, may very well be in yours to such an extent. I hope, Mrs. Dombey," he continued after a few moments, during which, in his increasing haughtiness, he had improved on his idea, "I may not find it necessary ever to intrust Mr. Carker with any message of objection or remonstrance to you; but as it would be derogatory to my position and reputation to be frequently holding trivial disputes with a lady upon whom I have conferred the highest distinction that it is in my power to bestow, I shall not scruple to avail myself of his services if I see occasion."

"And now," he thought, rising in his moral magnificence, and rising a stiffer and more impenetrable man than ever, "she knows me and my resolution."

The hand that had so pressed the bracelet was laid heavily upon her breast, but she looked at him still with an unaltered face, and said in a low voice:

"Wait! For God's sake! I must speak to you."

Why did she not, and what was the inward struggle that rendered her incapable of doing so for minutes, while, in the strong constraint she put upon her face, it was as fixed as any statue's—looking upon him with neither yielding nor unyielding, liking nor hatred, pride nor humility: nothing but a searching gaze?

"Did I ever tempt you to seek my hand? Did I ever use any art to win you? Was I ever more conciliating to you, when you pursued me, than I have been since our marriage? Was I ever other to you than I am?"

"It is wholly unnecessary, madam," said Mr. Dombey, "to enter upon such discussions."

"Did you think I loved you? Did you know I did not? Did you ever care, man! for my heart, or propose to yourself to win the worthless thing? Was there any poor pretence of any in our bargain? Upon your side or on mine?"

"These questions," said Mr. Dombey, "are all wide of the purpose, madam."

She moved between him and the door to prevent his going away, and, drawing her majestic figure to its height, looked steadily upon him still.

"You answer each of them. You answer me before I speak, I see. How can you help it you who know the miserable truth as well as I

Now, tell me. If I loved you to devotion, could I do more than render up my whole will and being to you, as you have just demanded? If my heart were pure and all untried, and you its idol, could you ask more; could you have more?"

"Possibly not, madam," he returned coolly.

"You know how different I am. You see me looking on you now, and you can read the warmth of passion for you that is breathing in my face." Not a curl of the proud lip, not a flash of the dark eye, nothing but the same intent and searching look, accompanied these words. "You know my general history. You have spoken of my mother. Do you think you can degrade, or bend or break, *me* to submission and obedience?"

Mr. Dombey smiled, as he might have smiled at an inquiry whether he thought he could raise an thousand pounds.

"If there is anything unusual here," she said, with a slight motion of her hand before her brow, which did not for a moment flinch from its immovable and otherwise expressionless gaze, "as I know there are unusual feelings here," raising her hand she pressed upon her bosom, and heavily returning it, "consider that there is no common meaning in the appeal I am going to make you. Yes, for I am going"—she said it in prompt reply to something in his face—to appeal to you."

Mr. Dombey, with a slightly condescending end of his chin that rustled and crackled his cravat, sat down on a sofa that was near him, to hear the appeal.

"If you can believe that I am of such a nature now,"—he fancied he saw tears glistening in her eyes, and he thought, complacently, that he had forced them from her, though none fell on her cheek, and she regarded him as steadily ever,—"as would make what I now say almost credible to myself, said to any man who had come my husband, but, above all, said to you, you may, perhaps, attach the greater weight to

In the dark end to which we are tending, and may come, we shall not involve ourselves one (that might not be much), but others."

Others! He knew at whom that word pointed, and frowned heavily.

"I speak to you for the sake of others. Also for our own sake; and for mine. Since our marriage, you have been arrogant to me; and I have repaid you in kind. You have shown to me and every one around us, every day and every hour, that you think I am graced and distinguished by your alliance. I do not think so; I have shown that too. It seems you do not

understand, or (so far as your power can go) intend that each of us shall take a separate course; and you expect from me, instead, a homage you will never have."

Although her face was still the same, there was emphatic confirmation of this "Never" in the very breath she drew.

"I feel no tenderness towards you; that you know. You would care nothing for it, if I did or could. I know as well that you feel none towards me. But we are linked together; and in the knot that ties us, as I have said, others are bound up. We must both die; we are both connected with the dead already, each by a little child. Let us forbear."

Mr. Dombey took a long respiration, as if he would have said, Oh! was *this* all?

"There is no wealth," she went on, turning paler as she watched him, while her eyes grew yet more lustrous in their earnestness, "that could buy these words of me, and the meaning that belongs to them. Once cast away as idle breath, no wealth or power can bring them back. I mean them; I have weighed them; and I will be true to what I undertake. If you will promise to forbear on your part, I will promise to forbear on mine. We are a most unhappy pair, in whom, from different causes, every sentiment that blesses marriage, or justifies it, is rooted out; but in the course of time, some friendship, or some fitness for each other, may arise between us. I will try to hope so, if you will make the endeavour too; and I will look forward to a better and a happier use of age than I have made of youth or prime."

Throughout she had spoken in a low, plain voice, that neither rose nor fell; ceasing, she dropped the hand with which she had enforced herself to be so passionless and distinct, but not the eyes with which she had so steadily observed him.

"Madam," said Mr. Dombey with his utmost dignity, "I cannot entertain any proposal of this extraordinary nature."

She looked at him yet, without the least change.

"I cannot," said Mr. Dombey, rising as he spoke, "consent to temporise or treat with you, Mrs. Dombey, upon a subject as to which you are in possession of my opinions and expectations. I have stated my *ultimatum*, madam, and have only to request your very serious attention to it."

To see the face change to its old expression, deepened in intensity! To see the eyes droop as from some mean and odious object! To see the lighting of the haughty brow! To see scorn.

anger, indignation, and abhorrence starting into light, and the pale blank earnestness vanish like a mist! He could not choose but look, although he looked to his dismay.

"Go, sir!" she said, pointing with an imperious hand towards the door. "Our first and last confidence is at an end. Nothing can make us stranger to each other than we are henceforth."

"I shall take my rightful course, madam," said Mr. Dombey, "undeterred, you may be sure, by any general declamation."

She turned her back upon him, and, without reply, sat down before her glass.

"I place my reliance on your improved sense of duty, and more correct feeling, and better reflection, madam," said Mr. Dombey.

She answered not one word. He saw no more expression of any heed of him, in the mirror, than if he had been an unseen spider on the wall, or beetle on the floor, or rather, than if he had been the one or other, seen and crushed when she last turned from him, and forgotten among the ignominious and dead vermin of the ground.

He looked back, as he went out at the door, upon the well-lighted and luxurious room, the beautiful and glittering objects everywhere displayed, the shape of Edith in its rich dress seated before her glass, and the face of Edith as the glass presented it to him; and he betook himself to his old chamber of cogitation, carrying away with him a vivid picture in his mind of all these things, and a rambling and unaccountable speculation (such as sometimes comes into a man's head) how they would all look when he saw them next.

For the rest, Mr. Dombey was very taciturn, and very dignified, and very confident of carrying out his purpose; and remained so.

He did not design accompanying the family to Brighton; but he graciously informed Cleopatra at breakfast, on the morning of departure, which arrived a day or two afterwards, that he might be expected down soon. There was no time to be lost in getting Cleopatra to any place recommended as being salutary; for, indeed, she seemed upon the wane, and turning of the earth earthy.

Without having undergone any decided second attack of her malady, the old woman seemed to have crawled backward in her recovery from the first. She was more lean and shrunken, more uncertain in her imbecility, and made stranger confusions in her mind and memory. Among other symptoms of this last affliction, she fell into the habit of confounding the names of her two sons-in-law, the living and the deceased;

and in general called Mr. Dombey either "Grangeby," or "Domber," or indifferently both.

But she was youthful, very youthful, still; and in her youthfulness she appeared at breakfast, before going away, in a new bonnet, made express, and a travelling robe that was embroidered and braided like an old baby's. It was not easy to put her into a fly-away bonnet now, or to keep the bonnet in its place on the back of her poor nodding head, when it was got on. In this instance, it had not only the extraneous effect of being always on one side, but of being perpetually tapped on the crown by Flowers the maid, who attended in the background during breakfast to perform that duty.

"Now, my dearest Grangeby," said Mrs. Skewton, "you must positively prom, she cut some of her words short, and cut out others altogether, "come down very soon."

"I said just now, madam," returned Mr. Dombey loudly and laboriously, "that I am coming in a day or two."

"Bless you, Domber!"

Here the major, who was come to take leave of the ladies, and who was staring through his apoplectic eyes at Mrs. Skewton's face, with the disinterested composure of an immortal being, said:

"Begad, ma'am, you don't ask old Joe to come!"

"Sterious wretch, who's he?" lisped Cleopatra. But a tap on the bonnet from Flowers seeming to jog her memory, she added, "Oh! you mean yourself, you naughty creature!"

"Devilish queer, sir," whispered the major to Mr. Dombey. "Bad case. Never *did* wrap up enough;" the major being buttoned to the chin. "Why, who should J. B. mean by Joe, but old Joe Bagstock—Joseph—your slave—Joe, ma'am? Here! Here's the man! Here are the Bagstock bellows, ma'am!" cried the major, striking himself a sounding blow on the chest.

"My dearest Edith—Grangeby—it's most trordinry thing," said Cleopatra pettishly, "that Major——"

"Bagstock! J. B.!" cried the major, seeing that she faltered for his name.

"Well, it don't matter," said Cleopatra. "Edith, my love, you know I never could remember names—what was it? oh!—most trordinry thing that so many people want come down see me. I'm not going for long. I'm coming back. Surely they can wait till I come back!"

Cleopatra looked all round the table as she said it, and appeared very uneasy.

"I won't have visitors—really don't want visitors," she said; "little repose—and all that sort of thing—is what I quire. No odious brutes must proach me till I've shaken off this numbness;" and, in a grisly resumption of her coquettish ways, she made a dab at the major with her fan, but overset Mr. Dombey's breakfast-cup instead, which was in quite a different direction.

Then she called for Withers, and charged him to see particularly that word was left about some trivial alterations in her room, which must be all made before she came back, and which must be set about immediately, as there was no saying how soon she might come back; for she had a great many engagements, and all sorts of people to call upon. Withers received these directions with becoming deference, and gave his guarantee for their execution; but when he withdrew a pace or two behind her, it appeared as if he couldn't help looking strangely at the major, who couldn't help looking strangely at Mr. Dombey, who couldn't help looking strangely at Cleopatra, who couldn't help nodding her bonnet over one eye, and rattling her knife and fork upon her plate in using them as if she were playing castanets.

Edith alone never lifted her eyes to any face at the table, and never seemed dismayed by anything her mother said or did. She listened to her disjointed talk, or at least turned her head towards her when addressed; replied in a few low words when necessary; and sometimes topped her when she was rambling, or brought her thoughts back with a monosyllable to the point from which they had strayed. The mother, however unsteady in other things, was constant in this—that she was always observant of her. She would look at the beautiful face, in its marble stillness and severity, now with a kind of fearful admiration; now in a giggling, foolish effort to move it to a smile; now with capricious fears and jealous shakings of her head, as imagining herself neglected by it; always with an attraction towards it, that never fluctuated like her other ideas, but had constant possession of her. From Edith she would sometimes look at Florence, and back again at Edith, in a manner that was wild enough; and sometimes she would try to look elsewhere, as if to escape from her daughter's face; but back to it she seemed forced to come, although it never sought hers unless sought, or troubled her with one single glance.

The breakfast concluded, Mrs. Skewton, affecting to lean girlishly upon the major's arm, it heavily supported on the other side by the maid, and propped up behind by

Withers the page, was conducted to the carriage, which was to take her, Florence, and Edith to Brighton.

"And is Joseph absolutely banished?" said the major, thrusting in his purple face over the steps. "Damme, ma'am, is Cleopatra so hard-hearted as to forbid her faithful Antony Bagstock to approach the presence?"

"Go along!" said Cleopatra; "I can't bear you. You shall see me when I come back, if you are very good."

"Tell Joseph he may live in hope, ma'am," said the major; "or he'll die in despair."

Cleopatra shuddered and leaned back.

"Edith, my dear," she said. "Tell him——"

"What?"

"Such dreadful words," said Cleopatra. "He uses such dreadful words!"

Edith signed to him to retire, gave the word to go on, and left the objectionable major to Mr. Dombey, to whom he returned whistling.

"I'll tell you what, sir," said the major, with his hands behind him, and his legs very wide asunder, "a fair friend of ours has removed to Queer Street."

"What do you mean, major?" inquired Mr. Dombey.

"I mean to say, Dombey," returned the major, "that you'll soon be an orphan-in-law."

Mr. Dombey appeared to relish this waggish description of himself so very little that the major wound up with the horse's cough as an expression of gravity.

"Damme, sir," said the major, "there is no use in disguising a fact. Joe is blunt, sir. That's his nature. If you take old Josh at all, you take him as you find him; and a de-vilish rusty, old rasper, of a close-toothed, J. B. file you do find him. Dombey," said the major, "your wife's mother is on the move, sir."

"I fear," returned Mr. Dombey with much philosophy, "that Mrs. Skewton is shaken."

"Shaken, Dombey!" said the major. "Smashed!"

"Change, however," pursued Mr. Dombey, "and attention may do much yet."

"Don't believe it, sir," returned the major. "Damme, sir, she never wrapped up enough. If a man don't wrap up," said the major, taking in another button of his buff waistcoat, "he has nothing to fall back upon. But some people *will* die. They *will* do it. Damme, they *will*. They're obstinate. I tell you what, Dombey, it may not be ornamental; it may not be refined; it may be rough and tough; but a little of the genuine old English Bagstock stamina, sir, would do all the good in the world to the human breed."

After imparting this precious piece of information, the major, who was certainly true blue, whatever other endowments he may have possessed or wanted, coming within the "genuine old English" classification, which has never been exactly ascertained, took his lobster eyes and his apoplexy to the club, and choked there all day.

Cleopatra, at one time fretful, at another self-complacent, sometimes awake, sometimes asleep, at all times juvenile, reached Brighton the same night, fell to pieces as usual, and was put away in bed; where a gloomy fancy might have pictured a more potent skeleton than the maid who should have been one, watching at the rose-coloured curtains, which were carried down to shed their bloom upon her.

It was settled in high council of medical authority that she should take a carriage airing every day, and that it was important she should get out every day and walk if she could. Edith was ready to attend her—always ready to attend her, with the same mechanical attention and immovable beauty—and they drove out alone; for Edith had an uneasiness in the presence of Florence, now that her mother was worse, and told Florence, with a kiss, that she would rather they two went alone.

Mrs. Skewton, on one particular day, was in the irresolute, exacting, jealous temper that had developed itself on her recovery from her first attack. After sitting silent in the carriage watching Edith for some time, she took her hand and kissed it passionately. The hand was neither given nor withdrawn, but simply yielded to her raising of it, and being released, dropped down again, almost as if it were insensible. At this she began to whimper and moan, and say what a mother she had been, and how she was forgotten! This she continued to do at capricious intervals, even when they had alighted; when she herself was halting along with the joint support of Withers and a stick, and Edith was walking by her side, and the carriage slowly following at a little distance.

It was a bleak, lowering, windy day, and they were out upon the Downs, with nothing but a bare sweep of land between them and the sky. The mother, with a querulous satisfaction in the monotony of her complaint, was still repeating it in a low voice from time to time, and the proud form of her daughter moved beside her slowly, when there came advancing over a dark ridge before them two other figures, which in the distance were so like an exaggerated imitation of their own, that Edith stopped.

Almost as she stopped, the two figures stopped; and that one which to Edith's thinking was

like a distorted shadow of her mother, spoke to the other earnestly, and with a pointing hand towards them. That one seemed inclined to turn back, but the other, in which Edith recognised enough that was like herself to strike her with an unusual feeling, not quite free from fear, came on; and then they came on together.

The greater part of this observation she made while walking towards them, for her stoppage had been momentary. Nearer observation showed her that they were poorly dressed; as wanderers about the country; that the younger woman carried knitted work or some such goods for sale; and that the old one toiled on empty-handed.

And yet, however far removed she was in dress, in dignity, in beauty, Edith could not but compare the younger woman with herself still. It may have been that she saw upon her face some traces which she knew were lingering in her own soul, if not yet written on that index; but, as the woman came on, returning her gaze, fixing her shining eyes upon her, undoubtedly presenting something of her own air and stature, and appearing to reciprocate her own thoughts, she felt a chill creep over her, as if the day were darkening, and the wind were colder.

They had now come up. The old woman, holding out her hand importunately, stopped to beg of Mrs. Skewton. The younger one stopped too, and she and Edith looked in one another's eyes.

"What is it that you have to sell?" said Edith.

"Only this," returned the woman, holding out her wares without looking at them. "I sold myself long ago."

"My lady, don't believe her," croaked the old woman to Mrs. Skewton; "don't believe what she says. She loves to talk like that. She's my handsome and undutiful daughter. She gives me nothing but reproaches, my lady, for all I have done for her. Look at her now, my lady, how she turns upon her poor old mother with her looks."

As Mrs. Skewton drew her purse out with a trembling hand, and eagerly fumbled for some money; which the other old woman greedily watched for—their heads all but touching in their hurry and decrepitude—Edith interposed.

"I have seen you," addressing the old woman "before."

"Yes, my lady," with a curtsy. "Down in Warwickshire. The morning among the trees. When you wouldn't give me nothing. But the gentleman, he give me something! Oh, bless him, bless him!" mumbled the old woman.

holding up her skinny hand, and grinning frightfully at her daughter.

"It's of no use attempting to stay me, Edith!" said Mrs. Skewton, angrily anticipating an objection from her. "You know nothing about it. I won't be dissuaded. I am sure this is an excellent woman, and a good mother."

"Yes, my lady, yes," chattered the old woman, holding out her avaricious hand. "Thankee, my lady. Lord bless you, my lady. Sixpence more, my pretty lady, as a good mother yourself."

"And treated undutifully enough, too, my good old creature, sometimes, I assure you," said Mrs. Skewton, whimpering. "There! Shake hands with me. You're a very good old creature—full of what's-his-name—and all that. You're all affection and et cetera. an't you?"

"Oh yes, my lady!"

"Yes, I'm sure you are; and so's that gentlemanly creature Grangeby. I must really shake hands with you again. And now you can go, you know; and I hope," addressing the daughter, "that you'll show more gratitude, and natural what's-its-name, and all the rest of it—but I never *did* remember names—for there never was a better mother than the good old creature's been to you. Come, Edith!"

As the ruin of Cleopatra trotted off whimpering, and wiping its eyes with a gingerly remembrance of rouge in their neighbourhood, the old woman hobbled another way, mumbling and counting her money. Not one word more, nor one other gesture, had been exchanged between Edith and the younger woman, but neither had removed her eyes from the other for a moment. They had remained confronted until now, when Edith, as awakening from a dream, passed slowly on.

"You're a handsome woman," muttered her shadow, looking after her; "but good looks won't save us. And you're a proud woman; but pride won't save us. We had need to know each other when we meet again!"

CHAPTER XLI.

NEW VOICES IN THE WAVES.

ALL is going on as it was wont. The waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery; the dust lies piled upon the shore; the sea birds soar and hover; the winds and clouds go forth upon their trackless flight; the white arms beckon, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away.

With a tender melancholy pleasure, Florence finds herself again on the old ground so sadly trodden, yet so happily, and thinks of him in the quiet place, where he and she have many and many a time conversed together; with the water welling up about his couch. And now, as she sits pensive there, she hears, in the wild low murmur of the sea, his little story told again, his very words repeated; and finds that all her life and hopes, and griefs, since—in the solitary house, and in the pageant it has changed to—have a portion in the burden of the marvellous song.

And gentle Mr. Toots, who wanders at a distance, looking wistfully towards the figure that he dotes upon, and has followed there, but cannot in his delicacy disturb at such a time, likewise hears the requiem of little Dombey on the waters, rising and falling in the lulls of their eternal madrigal in praise of Florence. Yes! and he faintly understands, poor Mr. Toots, that they are saying something of a time when he was sensible of being brighter and not addle-brained; and the tears rising in his eyes when he fears that he is dull and stupid now, and good for little but to be laughed at, diminish his satisfaction in their soothing reminder that he is relieved from present responsibility to the Chicken, by the absence of that game head of poultry in the country, training (at Toots's cost) for his great mill with the Larkey Boy.

But Mr. Toots takes courage when they whisper a kind thought to him; and by slow degrees, and with many indecisive stoppages on the way, approaches Florence. Stammering and blushing, Mr. Toots affects amazement when he comes near her, and says (having followed close on the carriage in which she travelled, every inch of the way from London, loving even to be choked by the dust of its wheels) that he never was so surprised in all his life.

"And you've brought Diogenes, too, Miss Dombey!" says Mr. Toots, thrilled through and through by the touch of the small hand so pleasantly and frankly given him.

No doubt Diogenes is there, and no doubt Mr. Toots has reason to observe him, for he comes straightway at Mr. Toots's legs, and tumbles over himself in the desperation with which he makes at him, like a very dog of Montargis. But he is checked by his sweet mistress.

"Down, Di, down. Don't you remember who first made us friends, Di? For shame!"

Oh! Well may Di lay his loving cheek againsts her hand, and run off, and run back, and run round her, barking, and run headlong at anybody coming by, to show his devotion.; Mr.

Toots would run headlong at anybody, too. A military gentleman goes past, and Mr. Toots would like nothing better than to run at him, full tilt.

"Diogenes is quite in his native air, isn't he, Miss Dombey?" says Mr. Toots.

Florence assents with a grateful smile.

"Miss Dombey," says Mr. Toots, "beg your pardon, but if you would like to walk to Blimber's, I—I'm going there."

Florence puts her arm in that of Mr. Toots without a word, and they walk away together, with Diogenes going on before. Mr. Toots's legs shake under him; and though he is splendidly dressed, he feels misfits, and sees wrinkles, in the masterpieces of Burgess and Co., and wishes he had put on that brightest pair of boots.

Doctor Blimber's house, outside, has as scholastic and studious an air as ever; and up there is the window where she used to look for the pale face, and where the pale face brightened when it saw her, and the wasted little hand waved kisses as she passed. The door is opened by the same weak-eyed young man, whose imbecility of grin at sight of Mr. Toots is feebleness of character personified. They are shown into the Doctor's study, where blind Homer and Minerva give them audience as of yore, to the sober ticking of the great clock in the hall; and where the globes stand still in their accustomed places, as if the world were stationary too, and nothing in it ever perished in obedience to the universal law, that, while it keeps it on the roll, calls everything to earth.

And here is Doctor Blimber, with his learned legs; and here is Mrs. Blimber, with her sky-blue cap; and here is Cornelia, with her sandy little row of curls, and her bright spectacles, still working like a sexton in the graves of languages. Here is the table upon which he sat forlorn and strange, the "new boy" of the school; and hither comes the distant cooing of the old boys, at their old lives in the old room on the old principle!

"Toots!" says Doctor Blimber, "I am very glad to see you, Toots."

Mr. Toots chuckles in reply.

"Also to see you, Toots, in such good company," says Doctor Blimber.

Mr. Toots, with a scarlet visage, explains that he has met Miss Dombey by accident, and that Miss Dombey wishing, like himself, to see the old place, they have come together.

"You will like," says Doctor Blimber, "to step among our young friends, Miss Dombey, no doubt. All fellow-students of yours, Toots,

once. I think we have no new disciples in our little portico, my dear," says Doctor Blimber to Cornelia, "since Mr. Toots left us."

"Except Bitherstone," returns Cornelia.

"Ay, truly," says the Doctor. "Bitherstone is new to Mr. Toots."

New to Florence, too, almost; for, in the schoolroom, Bitherstone—no longer Master Bitherstone of Mrs. Pipchin's—shows in collars and a neckcloth, and wears a watch. But Bitherstone, born beneath some Bengal star of ill omen, is extremely inky; and his lexicon has got so dropsical from constant reference, that it won't shut, and yawns as if it really could not bear to be so bothered. So does Bitherstone its master, forced at Doctor Blimber's highest pressure; but in the yawn of Bitherstone there is malice and snarl, and he has been heard to say that he wishes he could catch "old Blimber" in India. He'd precious soon find himself carried up the country by a few of his (Bitherstone's) coolies, and handed over to the Thugs: he can tell him that!

Briggs is still grinding in the mill of knowledge; and Tozer too; and Johnson too; and all the rest; the older pupils being principally engaged in forgetting, with prodigious labour, everything they knew when they were younger. All are as polite and pale as ever; and among them, Mr. Feeder, B.A., with his bony hand and bristly head, is still hard at it: with his Herodotus stop on just at present, and his other barrels on a shelf behind him.

A mighty sensation is created, even among these grave young gentlemen, by a visit from the emancipated Toots; who is regarded with a kind of awe, as one who has passed the Rubicon, and is pledged never to come back, and concerning the cut of whose clothes, and fashion of whose jewellery, whispers go about behind hands; the bilious Bitherstone, who is not of Mr. Toots's time, affecting to despise the latter to the smaller boys, and saying he knows better, and that he should like to see him coming that sort of thing in Bengal, where his mother has got an emerald belonging to him, that was taken out of the footstool of a rajah. Come now!

Bewildering emotions are awakened also by the sight of Florence, with whom every young gentleman immediately falls in love again; except, as aforesaid, the bilious Bitherstone, who declines to do so, out of contradiction. Black jealousies of Mr. Toots arise, and Briggs is of opinion that he can't so very old after all. But this disparaging insinuation is speedily mado nought by Mr. Toots saying aloud to Mr. Feeder B.A., "How are you, Feeder?" and asking him

to come and dine with him to-day at the Bedford; in right of which feasts he might set up as Old Parr, if he chose, unquestioned.

There is much shaking of hands, and much bowing, and a great desire on the part of each young gentleman to take Toots down in Miss Dombey's good graces; and then, Mr. Toots having bestowed a chuckle on his old desk, Florence and he withdraw with Mrs. Blimber and Cornelia; and Doctor Blimber is heard to observe behind them, as he comes out last, and shuts the door, "Gentlemen, we will now resume our studies." For that and little else is what the Doctor hears the sea say, or has heard it saying all his life.

Florence then steals away, and goes up-stairs to the old bedroom with Mrs. Blimber and Cornelia; Mr. Toots, who feels that neither he nor anybody else is wanted there, stands talking to the Doctor at the study door, or rather, hearing the Doctor talk to him, and wondering how he ever thought the study a great sanctuary, and the Doctor, with his round turned legs, like a clerical piano forte, an awful man. Florence soon comes down and takes leave; Mr. Toots takes leave; and Diogenes, who has been worrying the weak-eyed young man pitilessly all the time, shoots out at the door, and barks a glad defiance down the cliff; while Melia, and another of the Doctor's female domestics, look out of an upper window, laughing "at that there Toots," and saying of Miss Dombey, "But really, though, now—ain't she like her brother, only prettier?"

Mr. Toots, who saw when Florence came down that there were tears upon her face, is desperately anxious and uneasy, and at first fears that he did wrong in proposing the visit. But he is soon relieved by her saying she is very glad to have been there again, and by her talking quite cheerfully about it all, as they walked on by the sea. What with the voices there, and her sweet voice, when they come near Mr. Dombey's house, and Mr. Toots must leave her, he is so enslaved that he has not a scrap of free-will left; when she gives him her hand at parting, he cannot let it go.

"Miss Dombey, I beg your pardon," says Mr. Toots, in a sad flutter, "but if you would allow me to—to—"

The smiling and unconscious look of Florence brings him to a dead stop.

"If you would allow me to—if you would not consider it a liberty, Miss Dombey, if I was to—without any encouragement at all, if I was to hope, you know," says Mr. Toots.

Florence looks at him inquiringly.

"Miss Dombey," says Mr. Toots, who feels that he is in for it now, "I really am in that state of adoration of you that I don't know what to do with myself. I am the most deplorable wretch. If it wasn't at the corner of the square at present, I should go down on my knees, and beg and entreat of you, without any encouragement at all, just to let me hope that I may—may think it possible that you—"

"Oh, if you please, don't!" cries Florence, for the moment quite alarmed and distressed. "Oh, pray don't, Mr. Toots! Stop, if you please. Don't say any more. As a kindness and a favour to me, don't."

Mr. Toots is dreadfully abashed, and his mouth opens.

"You have been so good to me," says Florence, "I am so grateful to you, I have such reason to like you for being a kind friend to me, and I do like you so much;" and here the ingenuous face smiles upon him with the pleasant look of honesty in the world; "that I am sure you are only going to say good-bye!"

"Certainly, Miss Dombey," says Mr. Toots, "I—I—that's exactly what I mean. It's of no consequence."

"Good-bye!" cries Florence.

"Good-bye, Miss Dombey!" stammers Mr. Toots. "I hope you won't think anything about it. It's—it's of no consequence, thank you. It's not of the least consequence in the world."

Poor Mr. Toots goes home to his hotel in a state of desperation, locks himself into his bedroom, flings himself upon his bed, and lies there for a long time; as if it were of the greatest consequence nevertheless. But Mr. Feeder, B.A., is coming to dinner, which happens well for Mr. Toots, or there is no knowing when he might get up again. Mr. Toots is obliged to get up to receive him, and to give him hospitable entertainment.

And the generous influence of that social virtue, hospitality (to make no mention of wine and good cheer), opens Mr. Toots's heart, and warms him to conversation. He does not tell Mr. Feeder, B.A., what passed at the corner of the square; but when Mr. Feeder asks him "when it is to come off," Mr. Toots replies "that there are certain subjects"—which brings Mr. Feeder down a peg or two immediately. Mr. Toots adds, that he don't know what right Blimber had to notice his being in Miss Dombey's company, and that, if he thought he meant impudence by it, he'd have him out, Doctor or no Doctor; but he supposes it's only his ignorance. Mr. Feeder says he has no doubt of it.

Mr. Feeder, however, as an intimate friend, is not excluded from the subject. Mr. Toots merely requires that it should be mentioned mysteriously, and with feeling. After a few glasses of wine, he gives Miss Dombey's health, observing, "Feeder, you have no idea of the sentiments with which I propose that toast." Mr. Feeder replies, "Oh yes, I have, my dear Toots; and greatly they redound to your honour, old boy." Mr. Feeder is then agitated by friendship, and shakes hands; and says, if ever Toots wants a brother, he knows where to find him, either by post or parcel. Mr. Feeder likewise says that if he may advise, he would recommend Mr. Toots to learn the guitar, or, at least, the flute; for women like music, when you are paying your addresses to 'em, and he has found the advantage of it himself.

This brings Mr. Feeder, B.A., to the confession that he has his eye upon Cornelia Blimber. He informs Mr. Toots that he don't object to spectacles, and that if the Doctor were to do the handsome thing and give up the business, why, there they are—provided for. He says it's his opinion that when a man has made a handsome sum by his business, he is bound to give it up; and that Cornelia would be an assistance in it which any man might be proud of. Mr. Toots replies by launching wildly out into Miss Dombey's praises, and by insinuations that sometimes he thinks he should like to blow his brains out. Mr. Feeder strongly urges that it would be a rash attempt, and shows him, as a reconciliation to existence, Cornelia's portrait, spectacles and all.

Thus these quiet spirits pass the evening; and when it has yielded place to night, Mr. Toots walks home with Mr. Feeder, and parts with him at Doctor Blimber's door. But Mr. Feeder only goes up the steps, and, when Mr. Toots is gone, comes down again, to stroll upon the beach alone, and think about his prospects. Mr. Feeder plainly hears the waves informing him, as he loiters along, that Doctor Blimber will give up the business; and he feels a soft romantic pleasure in looking at the outside of the house, and thinking that the Doctor will first paint it, and put it into thorough repair.

Mr. Toots is likewise roaming up and down outside the casket that contains his jewel; and in a deplorable condition of mind, and not unsuspected by the police, gazes at a window where he sees a light, and which he has no doubt is Florence's. But it is not, for that is Mrs. Skewton's room; and while Florence, sleeping in another chamber, dreams lovingly, in the midst of the old scenes, and their old associa-

tions live again, the figure which in grim reality is substituted for the patient boy's on the same theatre, once more to connect it—but how differently!—with decay and death, is stretched there, wakeful and complaining. Ugly and haggard it lies upon its bed of unrest; and by it, in the terror of her unimpassioned loveliness—for it has terror in the sufferer's failing eyes—sits Edith. What do the waves say in the stillness of the night to them?

"Edith, what is that stone arm raised to strike me? Don't you see it?"

"There is nothing, mother, but your fancy."

"But my fancy! Everything is my fancy. Look! Is it possible that you don't see it?"

"Indeed, mother, there is nothing. Should I sit unmoved if there were any such thing there?"

"Unmoved?"—looking wildly at her—"it's gone now—and why are you so unmoved? That is not my fancy, Edith. It turns me cold to see you sitting at my side."

"I am sorry, mother."

"Sorry! You seem always sorry. But it is not for me!"

With that she cries; and, tossing her restless head from side to side upon her pillow, runs on about neglect, and the mother she has been, and the mother the good old creature was whom they met, and the cold return the daughters of such mothers make. In the midst of her incoherence, she stops, looks at her daughter, cries out that her wit is going, and hides her face upon the bed.

Edith, in compassion, bends over her and speaks to her. The sick old woman clutches her round the neck, and says with a look of horror,

"Edith! we are going home soon; going back. You mean that I shall go home again?"

"Yes, mother, yes."

"And what he said—what's his name—I never could remember names—Major—that dreadful word, when we came away—it's not true? Edith!" with a shriek and a stare, "it's not *that* that is the matter with me."

Night after night the light burns in the window, and the figure lies upon the bed, and Edith sits beside it, and the restless waves are calling to them both the whole night long. Night after night the waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery; the dust lies piled upon the shore; the sea birds soar and hover; the winds and clouds are on their trackless flight; the white arms beckon, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away.

And still the sick old woman looks into the

corner, where the stone arm—part of a figure of some tomb, she says—is raised to strike her. At last it falls; and then a dumb old woman lies upon the bed, and she is crooked, and shrunk up, and half of her is dead.

Such is the figure, painted and patched for the sun to mock, that is drawn slowly through the crowd from day to day; looking, as it goes, for the good old creature who was such a mother, and making mouths as it peers among the crowd in vain. Such is the figure that is often wheeled down to the margin of the sea, and stationed there; but on which no wind can blow freshness, and for which the murmur of the ocean has no soothing word. She lies and listens to it by the hour; but its speech is dark and gloomy to her, and a dread is on her face, and when her eyes wander over the expanse, they see but a broad stretch of desolation between earth and heaven.

Florence she seldom sees, and when she does, is angry with and mows at. Edith is beside her always, and keeps Florence away; and Florence, in her bed at night, trembles at the thought of death in such a shape, and often wakes and listens, thinking it has come. No one attends on her but Edith. It is better that few eyes should see her; and her daughter watches alone by the bedside.

A shadow even on that shadowed face, a sharpening even of the sharpened features, and a thickening of the veil before the eyes into a pall that shuts out the dim world, is come. Her wandering hands upon the coverlet join feebly palm to palm, and move towards her daughter; and a voice not like hers, not like any voice that speaks our mortal language—says, "For I nursed you!"

Edith, without a tear, kneels down to bring her voice closer to the sinking head, and answers:

"Mother, can you hear me?"

Staring wide, she tries to nod in answer.

"Can you recollect the night before I married?"

The head is motionless, but it expresses somehow that she does.

"I told you then that I forgave your part in it, and prayed God to forgive my own. I told you that the past was at an end between us. I say so now again. Kiss me, mother."

Edith touches the white lips, and for a moment all is still. A moment afterwards, her mother, with her girlish laugh, and the skeleton of the Cleopatra manner, rises in her bed.

Draw the rose-coloured curtains. There is something else upon its flight besides the wind

and clouds. Draw the rose-coloured curtains close!

Intelligence of the event is sent to Mr. Dombey in town, who waits upon Cousin Feenix (not yet able to make up his mind for Baden-Baden), who has just received it too. A good-natured creature like Cousin Feenix is the very man for a marriage or a funeral, and his position in the family renders it right that he should be consulted.

"Dombey," says Cousin Feenix, "upon my soul, I am very much shocked to see you on such a melancholy occasion. My poor aunt! She was a devilish lively woman."

Mr. Dombey replies, "Very much so."

"And made up," says Cousin Feenix, "really young, you know, considering. I am sure, on the day of your marriage, I thought she was good for another twenty years. In point of fact, I said so to a man at Brooks's—little Billy Joper—you know him, no doubt—man with a glass in his eye?"

Mr. Dombey bows a negative. "In reference to the obsequies," he hints, "whether there is any suggestion—"

"Well, upon my life," says Cousin Feenix, stroking his chin, which he has just enough of hand below his wristbands to do, "I really don't know. There's a Mausoleum down at my place, in the park, but I'm afraid it's in bad repair, and, in point of fact, in a devil of a state. But for being a little out at elbows, I should have had it put to rights; but I believe the people come and make picnic parties there inside the iron railings."

Mr. Dombey is clear that this won't do.

"There's an uncommon good church in the village," says Cousin Feenix thoughtfully; "pure specimen of the Anglo-Norman style, and admirably well sketched, too, by Lady Jane Finchbury—woman with tight stays—but they've spoilt it with whitewash, I understand, and it's a long journey."

"Perhaps Brighton itself," Mr. Dombey suggests.

"Upon my honour, Dombey, I don't think we could do better," says Cousin Feenix. "It's the spot, you see, and a very cheerful place."

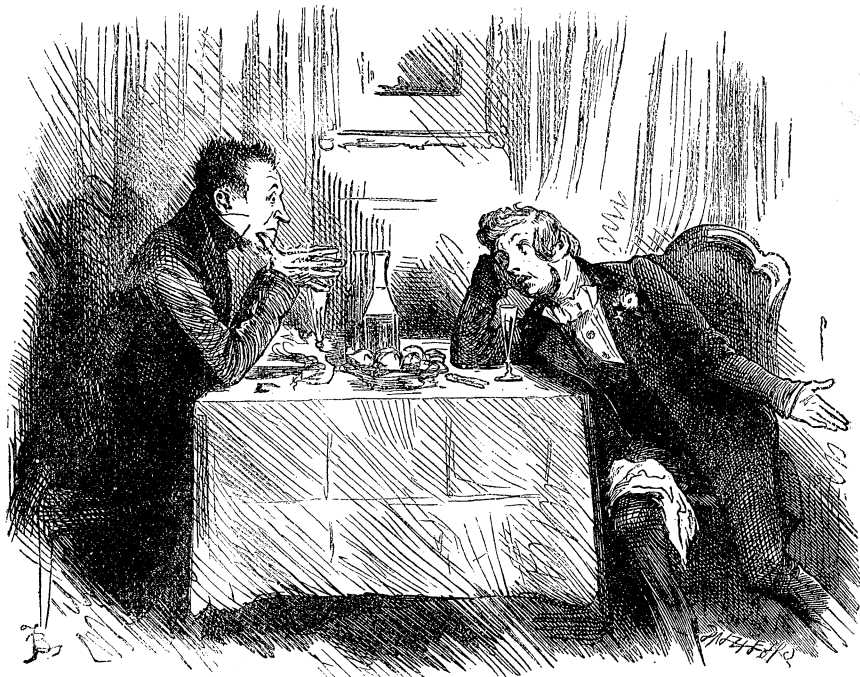
"And when," hints Mr. Dombey, "would it be convenient?"

"I shall make a point," says Cousin Feenix, "of pledging myself for any day you think best. I shall have great pleasure (melancholy pleasure, of course) in following my poor aunt to the confines of the—in point of fact, to the grave," says Cousin Feenix, failing in the other turn of speech.

"Would Monday do for leaving town?" says Mr. Dombey.

"Monday would suit me to perfection," replies Cousin Feenix. Therefore Mr. Dombey arranges to take Cousin Feenix down on that day, and presently takes his leave, attended to the stairs by Cousin Feenix, who says, at parting, "I'm really excessively sorry, Dombey, that you should have so much trouble about it;" to which Mr. Dombey answers, "Not at all."

At the appointed time Cousin Feenix and Mr. Dombey meet, and go down to Brighton, and representing, in their two selves, all the other mourners for the deceased lady's loss, attend her remains to their place of rest. Cousin Feenix, sitting in the mourning coach, recognises innumerable acquaintances on the road, but takes no other notice of them, in decorum, than checking them off aloud, as they go by, for Mr. Dombey's information, as "Tom Johnson. Man



"MR. TOOTS REPLIES BY LAUNCHING WILDLY OUT INTO MISS DOMBEY'S PRAISES, AND BY INSINUATIONS THAT SOMETIMES HE THINKS HE SHOULD LIKE TO BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT."

with cork leg, from White's. What, are *you* here, Tommy? Foley on a blood mare. The Smalder girls"—and so forth. At the ceremony Cousin Feenix is depressed, observing, that these are the occasions to make a man think, in point of fact, that he is getting shaky; and his eyes are really moistened when it is over. But he soon recovers: and so do the rest of Mrs. Skewton's relatives and friends, of whom the major continually tells the club that she never

did wrap up enough; while the young lady with the back, who has so much trouble with her eyelids, says, with a little scream, that she must have been enormously old, and that she died of all kinds of horrors, and you mustn't mention it.

So Edith's mother lies unmentioned of her dear friends, who are deaf to the waves that are hoarse with repetition of their mystery, and blind to the dust that is piled upon the shore, and to

the white arms that are beckoning, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away. But all goes on as it was wont upon the margin of the unknown sea; and Edith standing there alone, and listening to its waves, has dank weed cast up at her feet, to strew her path in life withal.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONFIDENTIAL AND ACCIDENTAL.

ATTIRED no more in Captain Cuttle's sable slops and sou'-wester hat, but dressed in a substantial suit of brown livery, which, while it affected to be a very sober and demure livery indeed, was really as self-satisfied and confident a one as tailor need desire to make, Rob the Grinder, thus transformed as to his outer man, and all regardless within of the captain and the Midshipman, except when he devoted a few minutes of his leisure time to crowing over those inseparable worthies, and recalling, with much applauding music from that brazen instrument, his conscience, the triumphant manner in which he had disembarassed himself of their company, now served his patron, Mr. Carker. Inmate of Mr. Carker's house, and serving about his person, Rob kept his round eyes on the white teeth with fear and trembling, and felt that he had need to open them wider than ever.

He could not have quaked more, through his whole being, before the teeth, though he had come into the service of some powerful enchanter, and they had been his strongest spells. The boy had a sense of power and authority in this patron of his that engrossed his whole attention, and exacted his most implicit submission and obedience. He hardly considered himself safe in thinking about him when he was absent, lest he should feel himself immediately taken by the throat again, as on the morning when he first became bound to him, and should see every one of the teeth finding him out, and taxing him with every fancy of his mind. Face to face with him, Rob had no more doubt that Mr. Carker read his secret thoughts, or that he could read them by the least exertion of his will if he were so inclined, than he had that Mr. Carker saw him when he looked at him. The ascendancy was so complete, and held him in such enthralment, that, hardly daring to think at all, but with his mind filled with a constantly dilating impression of his patron's irresistible

command over him, and power of doing anything with him, he would stand watching his pleasure, and trying to anticipate his orders, in a state of mental suspension as to all other things.

Rob had not informed himself, perhaps—in his then state of mind it would have been an act of no common temerity to inquire—whether he yielded so completely to this influence in any part, because he had floating suspicions of his patron's being a master of certain treacherous arts in which he had himself been a poor scholar at the Grinders' School. But certainly Rob admired him, as well as feared him. Mr. Carker, perhaps, was better acquainted with the sources of his power, which lost nothing by his management of it.

On the very night when he left the captain's service, Rob, after disposing of his pigeons, and even making a bad bargain in his hurry, had gone straight down to Mr. Carker's house, and hotly presented himself before his new master with a glowing face that seemed to expect commendation.

"What, scapegrace!" said Mr. Carker, glancing at his bundle. "Have you left your situation and come to me?"

"Oh, if you please, sir," faltered Rob, "you said, you know, when I come here last——"

"I said!" returned Mr. Carker. "What did I say?"

"If you please, sir, you didn't say nothing at all, sir," returned Rob, warned by the manner of this inquiry, and very much disconcerted.

His patron looked at him with a wide display of gums, and shaking his forefinger, observed:

"You'll come to an evil end, my vagabond friend, I foresee. There's ruin in store for you."

"Oh, if you please, don't, sir!" cried Rob, with his legs trembling under him. "I'm sure, sir, I only want to work for you, sir, and to wait upon you, sir, and to do faithful whatever I'm bid, sir."

"You had better do faithfully whatever you are bid," returned his patron, "if you have anything to do with me."

"Yes, I know that, sir," pleaded the submissive Rob; "I'm sure of that, sir. If you'll only be so good as try me, sir! And if ever you find me out, sir, doing anything against your wishes, I give you leave to kill me."

"You dog!" said Mr. Carker, leaning back in his chair, and smiling at him serenely. "That's nothing to what I'd do to you, if you tried to deceive me."

"Yes, sir," replied the abject Grinder, "I'm

sure you would be down upon me dreadful, sir. I wouldn't attempt for to go and do it, sir, not if I was bribed with golden guineas."

Thoroughly checked in his expectation of commendation, the crest-fallen Grinder stood looking at his patron, and vainly endeavouring not to look at him, with the uneasiness which a cur will often manifest in a similar situation.

"So you have left your old service, and come here to ask me to take you into mine, eh?" said Mr. Carker.

"Yes, if you please, sir," returned Rob, who, in doing so, had acted on his patron's own instructions, but dared not justify himself by the least insinuation to that effect.

"Well!" said Mr. Carker. "You know me, boy?"

"Please, sir, yes, sir," returned Rob, fumbling with his hat, and still fixed by Mr. Carker's eye, and fruitlessly endeavouring to unfix himself.

Mr. Carker nodded. "Take care, then!"

Rob expressed in a number of short bows his lively understanding of this caution, and was bowing himself back to the door, greatly relieved by the prospect of getting on the outside of it, when his patron stopped him.

"Halloa!" he cried, calling him roughly back. "You have been—— Shut that door."

Rob obeyed as if his life had depended on his alacrity.

"You have been used to eavesdropping. Do you know what that means?"

"Listening, sir?" Rob hazarded, after some embarrassed reflection.

His patron nodded. "And watching, and so forth."

"I wouldn't do such a thing here, sir," answered Rob; "upon my word and honour, I wouldn't, sir, I wish I may die if I would, sir, for anything that could be promised to me. I should consider it as much as all the world was worth to offer to do such a thing, unless I was ordered, sir."

"You had better not. You have been used, too, to babbling and tattling," said his patron with perfect coolness. "Beware of that here, or you're a lost rascal," and he smiled again, and again cautioned him with his forefinger.

The Grinder's breath came short and thick with consternation. He tried to protest the purity of his intentions, but could only stare at the smiling gentleman in a stupor of submission, with which the smiling gentleman seemed well enough satisfied, for he ordered him down-stairs, after observing him for some moments, in silence, and gave him to understand that he was retained in his employment.

This was the manner of Rob the Grinder's engagement by Mr. Carker, and his awe-stricken devotion to that gentleman had strengthened and increased, if possible, with every minute of his service.

It was a service of some months' duration, when early one morning Rob opened the garden-gate to Mr. Dombey, who was come to breakfast with his master by appointment. At the same moment his master himself came hurrying forth to receive the distinguished guest, and give him welcome with all his teeth.

"I never thought," said Carker when he had assisted him to alight from his horse, "to see you here, I'm sure. This is an extraordinary day in my calendar. No occasion is very special to a man like you, who may do anything; but, to a man like me, the case is widely different."

"You have a tasteful place here, Carker," said Mr. Dombey, condescending to stop upon the lawn to look about him.

"You can afford to say so," returned Carker. "Thank you."

"Indeed," said Mr. Dombey in his lofty patronage, "any one might say so. As far as it goes, it is a very commodious and well-arranged place—quite elegant."

"As far as it goes, truly," returned Carker with an air of disparagement. "It wants that qualification. Well! we have said enough about it; and though you can afford to praise it, I thank you none the less. Will you walk in?"

Mr. Dombey, entering the house, noticed, as he had reason to do, the complete arrangement of the rooms, and the numerous contrivances for comfort and effect that abounded there. Mr. Carker, in his ostentation of humility, received this notice with a deferential smile, and said he understood its delicate meaning, and appreciated it, but in truth the cottage was good enough for one in his position—better, perhaps, than such a man should occupy, poor as it was.

"But perhaps to you, who are so far removed, it really does look better than it is," he said, with his false mouth distended to its fullest stretch. "Just as monarchs imagine attractions in the lives of beggars."

He directed a sharp glance and a sharp smile at Mr. Dombey as he spoke, and a sharper glance and a sharper smile yet, when Mr. Dombey, drawing himself up before the fire, in the attitude so often copied by his second in command, looked round at the pictures on the walls. Cursorially as his cold eye wandered over them, Carker's keen glance accompanied his, and kept pace with his, marking exactly where it went, and what it saw. As it rested on one picture in

particular, Carker hardly seemed to breathe, his sidelong scrutiny was so cat-like and vigilant, but the eye of his great chief passed from that, as from the others, and appeared no more impressed by it than by the rest.

Carker looked at it—it was the picture that resembled Edith—as if it were a living thing, and with a wicked, silent laugh upon his face, that seemed in part addressed to it, though it was all derisive of the great man standing so unconscious beside him. Breakfast was soon set upon the table: and, inviting Mr. Dombey to a chair which had its back towards this picture, he took his own seat opposite to it as usual.

Mr. Dombey was even graver than it was his custom to be, and quite silent. The parrot, swinging in the gilded hoop within her gaudy cage, attempted in vain to attract notice, for Carker was too observant of his visitor to heed her; and the visitor, abstracted in meditation, looked fixedly, not to say sullenly, over his stiff neckcloth, without raising his eyes from the table-cloth. As to Rob, who was in attendance, all his faculties and energies were so locked up in observation of his master, that he scarcely ventured to give shelter to the thought that the visitor was the great gentleman before whom he had been carried as a certificate of the family health in his childhood, and to whom he had been indebted for his leather smalls.

"Allow me," said Carker suddenly, "to ask how Mrs. Dombey is?"

He leaned forward obsequiously as he made the inquiry, with his chin resting on his hand; and, at the same time, his eyes went up to the picture, as if he said to it, "Now see how I will lead him on!"

Mr. Dombey reddened as he answered:

"Mrs. Dombey is quite well. You remind me, Carker, of some conversation that I wish to have with you."

"Robin, you can leave us," said his master, at whose mild tones Robin started and disappeared, with his eyes fixed on his patron to the last. "You don't remember that boy, of course?" he added when the immeshed Grinder was gone.

"No," said Mr. Dombey with magnificent indifference.

"No: likely that a man like you would. Hard! possible," murmured Carker. "But he is one of that family from whom you took a nurse. Perhaps you may remember having generously charged yourself with his education?"

"Is it that boy?" said Mr. Dombey with a frown. "He does little credit to his education, I believe."

"Why, he is a young rip, I am afraid," returned Carker with a shrug. "He bears that character. But the truth is, I took him into my service because, being able to get no other employment, he conceived (had been taught at home, I dare say) that he had some sort of claim upon you, and was constantly trying to dog your heels with his petition. And although my defined and recognised connection with your affairs is merely of a business character, still I have that spontaneous interest in everything belonging to you, that——"

He stopped again, as if to discover whether he had led Mr. Dombey far enough yet. And again, with his chin resting on his hand, he leered at the picture.

"Carker," said Mr. Dombey, "I am sensible that you do not limit your——"

"Service," suggested his smiling entertainer.

"No; I prefer to say your regard," observed Mr. Dombey; very sensible, as he said so, that he was paying him a handsome and flattering compliment, "to our mere business relations. Your consideration for my feelings, hopes, and disappointments, in the little instance you have just now mentioned, is an example in point. I am obliged to you, Carker."

Mr. Carker bent his head slowly, and very softly rubbed his hands, as if he were afraid by any action to disturb the current of Mr. Dombey's confidence.

"Your allusion to it is opportune," said Mr. Dombey after a little hesitation, "for it prepares the way to what I was beginning to say to you, and reminds me that that involves no absolutely new relations between us, although it may involve more personal confidence on my part than I have hitherto——"

"Distinguished me with," suggested Carker, bending his head again. "I will not say to you how honoured I am; for a man like you well knows how much honour he has in his power to bestow at pleasure."

"Mrs. Dombey and myself," said Mr. Dombey, passing this compliment with august self-denial, "are not quite agreed upon some points. We do not appear to understand each other yet. Mrs. Dombey has something to learn."

"Mrs. Dombey is distinguished by many rare attractions; and has been accustomed, no doubt, to receive much adulation," said the smooth, sleek watcher of his slightest look and tone. "But where there is affection, duty, and respect, any little mistakes engendered by such causes are soon set right."

Mr. Dombey's thoughts instinctively flew back to the face that had looked at him in his wife's

dressing-room, when an imperious hand was stretched towards the door: and remembering the affection, duty, and respect expressed in it, he felt the blood rush to his own face quite as plainly as the watchful eyes upon him saw it there.

"Mrs. Dombey and myself," he went on to say, "had some discussion, before Mrs. Skewton's death, upon the causes of my dissatisfaction; of which you will have formed a general understanding from having been a witness of what passed between Mrs. Dombey and myself

on the evening when you were at our—at my house."

"When I so much regretted being present," said the smiling Carker. "Proud as a man in my position necessarily must be of your familiar notice—though I give you no credit for it; you may do anything you please without losing caste—and honoured as I was by an early presentation to Mrs. Dombey, before she was made eminent by bearing your name, I almost regretted that night, I assure you, that I had been the object of such especial good fortune."



"DOMBEY," SAYS COUSIN FEENIX, "UPON MY SOUL, I AM VERY MUCH SHOCKED TO SEE YOU ON SUCH A MELANCHOLY OCCASION."

That any man could, under any possible circumstances, regret the being distinguished by his condescension and patronage was a moral phenomenon which Mr. Dombey could not comprehend. He therefore responded, with a considerable accession of dignity, "Indeed! And why, Carker?"

"I fear," returned the confidential agent, "that Mrs. Dombey, never very much disposed to regard me with favourable interest—one in my position could not expect that from a lady naturally proud, and whose pride becomes her

so well—may not easily forgive my innocent part in that conversation. Your displeasure is no light matter, you must remember; and to be visited with it before a third party——"

"Carker," said Mr. Dombey arrogantly; "I presume that I am the first consideration?"

"Oh! Can there be a doubt about it?" replied the other, with the impatience of a man admitting a notorious and incontrovertible fact.

"Mrs. Dombey becomes a secondary consideration when we are both in question, I imagine," said Mr. Dombey. "Is that so?"

"Is it so?" returned Carker. "Do you know better than any one that you have no need to ask?"

"Then I hope, Carker," said Mr. Dombey, "that your regret in the acquisition of Mrs. Dombey's displeasure may be almost counterbalanced by your satisfaction in retaining my confidence and good opinion."

"I have the misfortune, I find," returned Carker, "to have incurred that displeasure. Mrs. Dombey has expressed it to you?"

"Mrs. Dombey has expressed various opinions," said Mr. Dombey with majestic coldness and indifference, "in which I do not participate, and which I am not inclined to discuss, or to recall. I made Mrs. Dombey acquainted, some time since, as I have already told you, with certain points of domestic deference and submission on which I felt it necessary to insist. I failed to convince Mrs. Dombey of the expediency of her immediately altering her conduct in those respects, with a view to her own peace and welfare, and my dignity; and I informed Mrs. Dombey that if I should find it necessary to object or remonstrate again, I should express my opinion to her through yourself, my confidential agent."

Blended with the look that Carker bent upon him was a devilish look at the picture over his head, that struck upon it like a flash of lightning.

"Now, Carker," said Mr. Dombey, "I do not hesitate to say to you that I *will* carry my point. I am not to be trifled with. Mrs. Dombey must understand that my will is law, and that I cannot allow of one exception to the whole rule of my life. You will have the goodness to undertake this charge, which, coming from me, is not unacceptable to you, I hope, whatever regret you may politely profess—for which I am obliged to you on behalf of Mrs. Dombey; and you will have the goodness, I am persuaded, to discharge it as exactly as any other commission."

"You know," said Mr. Carker, "that you have only to command me."

"I know," said Mr. Dombey with a majestic indication of assent, "that I have only to command you. It is necessary that I should proceed in this. Mrs. Dombey is a lady undoubtedly highly qualified, in many respects, to—"

"To do credit even to your choice," suggested Carker, with a fawning show of teeth.

"Yes; if you please to adopt that form of words," said Mr. Dombey in his tone of state; "and at present I do not conceive that Mrs. Dombey does that credit to it to which it is entitled. There is a principle of opposition in Mrs. Dombey that must be eradicated; that must be overcome: Mrs. Dombey does not appear to

understand," said Mr. Dombey forcibly, "that the idea of opposition to Me is monstrous and absurd."

"We, in the City, know you better," replied Carker, with a smile from ear to ear.

"You know me better," said Mr. Dombey.

"I hope so. Though, indeed, I am bound to do Mrs. Dombey the justice of saying, however inconsistent it may seem with her subsequent conduct (which remains unchanged), that on my expressing my disapprobation and determination to her, with some severity, on the occasion to which I have referred, my admonition appeared to produce a very powerful effect." Mr. Dombey delivered himself of those words with most portentous stateliness. "I wish you to have the goodness, then, to inform Mrs. Dombey, Carker, from me, that I must recall our former conversation to her remembrance in some surprise that it has not yet had its effect. That I must insist upon her regulating her conduct by the injunctions laid upon her in that conversation. That I am not satisfied with her conduct. That I am greatly dissatisfied with it. And that I shall be under the very disagreeable necessity of making you the bearer of yet more unwelcome and explicit communications, if she has not the good sense and the proper feeling to adapt herself to my wishes, as the first Mrs. Dombey did, and, I believe I may add, as any other lady in her place would."

"The first Mrs. Dombey lived very happily," said Carker.

"The first Mrs. Dombey had great good sense," said Mr. Dombey in a gentlemanly toleration of the dead, "and very correct feeling."

"Is Miss Dombey like her mother, do you think?" said Carker.

Swiftly and darkly Mr. Dombey's face changed. His confidential agent eyed it keenly.

"I have approached a painful subject," he said in a soft regretful tone of voice, irreconcilable with his eager eye. "Pray forgive me. I forget these chains of association in the interest I have. Pray forgive me."

But, for all he said, his eager eye scanned Mr. Dombey's downcast face none the less closely; and then it shot a strange triumphant look at the picture, as appealing to it to bear witness how he led him on again, and what was coming.

"Carker," said Mr. Dombey, looking here and there upon the table, and speaking in a somewhat altered and more hurried voice, and with a paler lip, "there is no occasion for apology. You mistake. The association is with the matter in hand, and not with any recollection."

tion, as you suppose. I do not approve of Mrs. Dombey's behaviour towards my daughter."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Carker, "I don't quite understand."

"Understand, then," returned Mr. Dombey, "that you may make that—that you *will* make that, if you please—matter of direct objection from me to Mrs. Dombey. You will please to tell her that her show of devotion for my daughter is disagreeable to me. It is likely to be noticed. It is likely to induce people to contrast Mrs. Dombey in her relation towards my daughter, with Mrs. Dombey in her relation towards myself. You will have the goodness to let Mrs. Dombey know, plainly, that I object to it; and that I expect her to defer, immediately, to my objection. Mrs. Dombey may be in earnest, or she may be pursuing a whim, or she may be opposing me; but I object to it in any case, and in every case. If Mrs. Dombey is in earnest, so much the less reluctant should she be to desist; for she will not serve my daughter by any such display. If my wife has any superfluous gentleness and duty over and above her proper submission to me, she may bestow them where she pleases, perhaps; but I will have submission first!—Carker," said Mr. Dombey, checking the unusual emotion with which he had spoken, and falling into a tone more like that in which he was accustomed to assert his greatness, "you will have the goodness not to omit or slur this point, but to consider it a very important part of your instructions."

Mr. Carker bowed his head, and rising from the table, and standing thoughtfully before the fire, with his hand to his smooth chin, looked down at Mr. Dombey with the evil slyness of some monkish carving, half human and half brute; or like a leering face on an old water-spout. Mr. Dombey, recovering his composure by degrees, or cooling his emotion in his sense of having taken a high position, sat gradually stiffening again, and looking at the parrot as she swung to and fro in her great wedding-ring.

"I beg your pardon," said Carker after a silence, suddenly resuming his chair, and drawing it opposite to Mr. Dombey's, "but let me understand. Mrs. Dombey is aware of the probability of your making me the organ of your displeasure?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Dombey. "I have said so."

"Yes," rejoined Carker quickly, "but why?"

"Why!" Mr. Dombey repeated, not without hesitation. "Because I told her."

"Ay," replied Carker. "But why did you tell her? You see," he continued with a smile,

and softly laying his velvet hand, as a cat might have laid its sheathed claws, on Mr. Dombey's arm; "if I perfectly understand what is in your mind, I am so much more likely to be useful, and to have the happiness of being effectually employed. I think I *do* understand. I have not the honour of Mrs. Dombey's good opinion. In my position I have no reason to expect it; but I take the fact to be, that I have not got it?"

"Possibly not," said Mr. Dombey.

"Consequently," pursued Carker, "your making these communications to Mrs. Dombey through me is sure to be particularly unpalatable to that lady?"

"It appears to me," said Mr. Dombey with haughty reserve, and yet with some embarrassment, "that Mrs. Dombey's views upon the subject form no part of it as it presents itself to you and me, Carker. But it may be so."

"And—pardon me—do I misconceive you," said Carker, "when I think you descry in this a likely means of humbling Mrs. Dombey's pride—I use the word as expressive of a quality which, kept within due bounds, adorns and graces a lady so distinguished for her beauty and accomplishments—and, not to say of punishing her, but of reducing her to the submission you so naturally and justly require?"

"I am not accustomed, Carker, as you know," said Mr. Dombey, "to give such close reasons for any course of conduct I think proper to adopt, but I will gainsay nothing of this. If you have any objection to found upon it, that is indeed another thing, and the mere statement that you have one will be sufficient. But I have not supposed, I confess, that any confidence I could intrust to you would be likely to degrade you—"

"Oh! I degraded!" exclaimed Carker. "In your service!"

"—Or to place you," pursued Mr. Dombey, "in a false position."

"I in a false position!" exclaimed Carker. "I shall be proud—delighted—to execute your trust. I could have wished, I own, to have given the lady at whose feet I would lay my humble duty and devotion—for is she not your wife?—no new cause of dislike; but a wish from you is, of course, paramount to every other consideration on earth. Besides, when Mrs. Dombey is converted from these little errors of judgment, incidental, I would presume to say, to the novelty of her situation, I shall hope that she will perceive, in the slight part I take, only a grain—my removed and different sphere gives room for little more—of the respect for you, and sacrifice of all considerations to you, of which it will be her

pleasure and privilege to garner up a great store every day."

Mr. Dombey seemed, at the moment, again to see her with her hand stretched out towards the door, and again to hear through the mild speech of his confidential agent an echo of the words, "Nothing can make us stranger to each other than we are henceforth!" But he shook off the fancy, and did not shake in his resolution, and said, "Certainly, no doubt."

"There is nothing more?" quoth Carker, drawing his chair back to its old place—for they had taken little breakfast as yet—and pausing for an answer before he sat down.

"Nothing," said Mr. Dombey, "but this: You will be good enough to observe, Carker, that no message to Mrs. Dombey with which you are or may be charged admits of reply. You will be good enough to bring me no reply: Mrs. Dombey is informed that it does not become me to temporise or treat upon any matter that is at issue between us, and that what I say is final."

Mr. Carker signified his understanding of these credentials, and they fell to breakfast with what appetite they might. The Grinder also, in due time, reappeared, keeping his eyes upon his master without a moment's respite, and passing the time in a reverie of worshipful terror. Breakfast concluded, Mr. Dombey's horse was ordered out again, and Mr. Carker mounting his own, they rode off for the City together.

Mr. Carker was in capital spirits, and talked much. Mr. Dombey received his conversation with the sovereign air of a man who had a right to be talked to, and occasionally condescended to throw in a few words to carry on the conversation. So they rode on characteristically enough. But Mr. Dombey, in his dignity, rode with very long stirrups, and a very loose rein, and very rarely deigned to look down to see where his horse went. In consequence of which it happened that Mr. Dombey's horse, while going at a round trot, stumbled on some loose stones, threw him, rolled over him, and lashing out with his iron-shod feet, in his struggles to get up, kicked him.

Mr. Carker, quick of eye, steady of hand, and a good horseman, was afoot, and had the struggling animal upon his legs and by the bridle, in a moment. Otherwise that morning's confidence would have been Mr. Dombey's last. Yet even with the flush and hurry of this action red upon him, he bent over his prostrate chief with every tooth disclosed, and muttered as he stooped down, "I have given good cause of offence to Mrs. Dombey *now*, if she knew it!"

Mr. Dombey being insensible, and bleeding,

from the head and face, was carried by certain menders of the road, under Carker's direction, to the nearest public-house, which was not far off, and where he was soon attended by divers surgeons, who arrived in quick succession from all parts, and who seemed to come by some mysterious instinct, as vultures are said to gather about a camel who dies in the desert. After being at some pains to restore him to consciousness, these gentlemen examined into the nature of his injuries. One surgeon who lived hard by was strong for a compound fracture of the leg, which was the landlord's opinion also; but two surgeons who lived at a distance, and were only in that neighbourhood by accident, combated this opinion so disinterestedly, that it was decided at last that the patient, though severely cut and bruised, had broken no bones but a lesser rib or so, and might be carefully taken home before night. His injuries being dressed and bandaged, which was a long operation, and he at length left to repose, Mr. Carker mounted his horse again, and rode away to carry the intelligence home.

Crafty and cruel as his face was at the best of times, though it was a sufficiently fair face as to form and regularity of feature, it was at its worst when he set forth on this errand; animated by the craft and cruelty of thoughts within him, suggestions of remote possibility rather than of design or plot, that made him ride as if he hunted men and women. Drawing rein at length, and slackening in his speed, as he came into the more public roads, he checked his white-legged horse into picking his way along as usual, and hid himself beneath his sleek, hushed, crouching manner, and his ivory smile, as he best could.

He rode direct to Mr. Dombey's house, alighted at the door, and begged to see Mrs. Dombey on an affair of importance. The servant who showed him to Mr. Dombey's own room soon returned to say that it was not Mrs. Dombey's hour for receiving visitors, and that he begged pardon for not having mentioned it before.

Mr. Carker, who was quite prepared for a cold reception, wrote upon a card that he must take the liberty of pressing for an interview, and that he would not be so bold as to do so, *for the second time* (this he underlined), if he were not equally sure of the occasion being sufficient for his justification. After a trifling delay, Mrs. Dombey's maid appeared, and conducted him to a morning room up-stairs, where Edith and Florence were together.

He had never thought Edith half so beautiful

before. Much as he admired the graces of her face and form, and freshly as they dwelt within his sensual remembrance, he had never thought her half so beautiful.

Her glance fell haughtily upon him in the doorway; but he looked at Florence—though only in the act of bending his head, as he came in—with some irrepressible expression of the new power he held; and it was his triumph to see the glance droop and falter, and to see that Edith half rose up to receive him.

He was very sorry, he was deeply grieved; he couldn't say with what unwillingness he came to prepare her for the intelligence of a very slight accident. He entreated Mrs. Dombey to compose herself. Upon his sacred word of honour, there was no cause of alarm. But Mr. Dombey—

Florence uttered a sudden cry. He did not look at her, but at Edith. Edith composed and reassured her. *She* uttered no cry of distress. No, no.

Mr. Dombey had met with an accident in riding. His horse had slipped, and he had been thrown.

Florence wildly exclaimed that he was badly hurt; that he was killed!

No. Upon his honour, Mr. Dombey, though stunned at first, was soon recovered, and, though certainly hurt, was in no kind of danger. If this were not the truth, he, the distressed intruder, never could have had the courage to present himself before Mrs. Dombey. It was the truth indeed, he solemnly assured her.

All this he said as if he were answering Edith, and not Florence, and with his eyes and his smile fastened on Edith.

He then went on to tell her where Mr. Dombey was lying, and to request that a carriage might be placed at his disposal to bring him home.

"Mamma," faltered Florence in tears, "if I might venture to go!"

Mr. Carker, having his eyes on Edith when he heard these words, gave her a secret look, and slightly shook his head. He saw how she battled with herself before she answered him with her handsome eyes, but he wrested the answer from her—he showed her that he would have it, or that he would speak and cut Florence to the heart—and she gave it to him. As he had looked at the picture in the morning, so he looked at her afterwards, when she turned her eyes away.

"I am directed to request," he said, "that the new housekeeper—Mrs. Pipchin, I think, is the name—"

Nothing escaped him. He saw, in an instant,

that she was another slight of Mr. Dombey's on his wife.

"—May be informed that Mr. Dombey wishes to have his bed prepared in his own apartments down-stairs, as he prefers those rooms to any other. I shall return to Mr. Dombey almost immediately. That every possible attention has been paid to his comfort, and that he is the object of every possible solicitude, I need not assure you, madam. Let me again say, there is no cause for the least alarm. Even you may be quite at ease, believe me."

He bowed himself out with his extremest show of deference and conciliation; and having returned to Mr. Dombey's room, and there arranged for a carriage being sent after him to the City, mounted his horse again and rode slowly thither. He was very thoughtful as he went along, and very thoughtful there, and very thoughtful in the carriage on his way back to the place where Mr. Dombey had been left. It was only when sitting by that gentleman's couch that he was quite himself again, and conscious of his teeth.

About the time of twilight, Mr. Dombey, grievously afflicted with aches and pains, was helped into his carriage, and propped with cloaks and pillows on one side of it, while his confidential agent bore him company upon the other. As he was not to be shaken, they moved at little more than a foot-pace; and hence it was quite dark when he was brought home. Mrs. Pipchin, bitter and grim, and not oblivious of the Peruvian mines, as the establishment in general had good reason to know, received him at the door, and freshened the domestics with several little sprinklings of wordy vinegar, while they assisted in conveying him to his room. Mr. Carker remained in attendance until he was safe in bed, and then, as he declined to receive any female visitor but the excellent Ogress who presided over his household, waited on Mrs. Dombey once more, with his report on her lord's condition.

He again found Edith alone with Florence, and he again addressed the whole of his soothing speech to Edith, as if she were a prey to the liveliest and most affectionate anxieties. So earnest he was in his respectful sympathy, that, on taking leave, he ventured—with one more glance towards Florence at the moment—to take her hand, and bending over it, to touch it with his lips.

Edith did not withdraw the hand, nor did she strike his fair face with it, despite the flush upon her cheek, the bright light in her eyes, and the dilation of her whole form. But when she was alone in her own room, she struck it on the

marble chimney-shelf, so that, at one blow, it was bruised, and bled; and held it from her, near the shining fire, as if she could have thrust it in and burned it.

Far into the night she sat alone, by the sinking blaze, in dark and threatening beauty, watching the murky shadows looming on the wall, as if her thoughts were tangible and cast them there. Whatever shapes of outrage and affront, and black foreshadowings of things that might happen, flickered, indistinct and giant-like, before her, one resented figure marshalled them against her. And that figure was her husband.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT.

FLORENCE, long since awakened from her dream, mournfully observed the estrangement between her father and Edith, and saw it widen more and more, and knew that there was greater bitterness between them every day. Each day's added knowledge deepened the shade upon her love and hope, roused up the old sorrow that had slumbered for a little time, and made it even heavier to bear than it had been before—

It had been hard—how hard may none but Florence ever know!—to have the natural affection of a true and earnest nature turned to agony; and slight, or stern repulse, substituted for the tenderest protection and the dearest care. It had been hard to feel in her deep heart what she had felt, and never know the happiness of one touch of response. But it was much more hard to be compelled to doubt either her father or Edith, so affectionate and dear to her, and to think of her love for each of them, by turns, with fear, distrust, and wonder.

Yet Florence now began to do so; and the doing of it was a task imposed upon her by the very purity of her soul, as one she could not fly from. She saw her father cold and obdurate to Edith, as to her; hard, inflexible, unyielding. Could it be, she asked herself with starting tears, that her own dear mother had been made unhappy by such treatment, and had pined away and died? Then she would think how proud and stately Edith was to every one but her, with what disdain she treated him, how distantly she kept apart from him, and what she had said on the night when she came home; and quickly it would come on Florence, almost as a crime,

that she loved one who was set in opposition to her father, and that her father, knowing of it, must think of her in his solitary room as the unnatural child who added this wrong to the old fault, so much wept for, of never having won his fatherly affection from her birth. The next kind word from Edith, the next kind glance, would shake these thoughts again, and make them seem like black ingratitude; for who but she had cheered the drooping heart of Florence, so lonely and so hurt, and been its best of comforters? Thus, with her gentle nature yearning to them both, feeling the misery of both, and whispering doubts of her own duty to both, Florence in her wider and expanded love, and by the side of Edith, endured more than when she had hoarded up her undivided secret in the mournful house, and her beautiful mamma had never dawned upon it.

One exquisite unhappiness, that would have far outweighed this, Florence was spared. She never had the least suspicion that Edith, by her tenderness for her, widened the separation from her father, or gave him new cause of dislike. If Florence had conceived the possibility of such an effect being wrought by such a cause, what grief she would have felt, what sacrifice she would have tried to make, poor loving girl, how fast and sure her quiet passage might have been beneath it to the presence of that higher Father who does not reject his children's love, or spurn their tried and broken hearts, Heaven knows! But it was otherwise, and that was well.

No word was ever spoken between Florence and Edith, now, on these subjects. Edith had said there ought to be between them, in that wise, a division and a silence like the grave itself: and Florence felt that she was right.

In this state of affairs her father was brought home suffering and disabled: and gloomily retired to his own rooms, where he was tended by servants, not approached by Edith, and had no friend or companion but Mr. Carker, who withdrew near midnight.

"And nice company *he* is, Miss Floy," said Susan Nipper. "Oh, he's a precious piece of goods! If ever he wants a character don't let him come to me whatever he does, that's all I tell him."

"Dear Susan," urged Florence, "don't!"

"Oh it's very well to say 'don't' Miss Floy," returned the Nipper, much exasperated; "but raly begging your pardon we're coming to such passes that it turns all the blood in a person's body into pins and needles, with their pints all ways. Don't mistake me, Miss Floy, I don't mean nothing again your ma-in-law who has

always treated me as a lady should though she is rather high I must say, not that I have any right to object to that particular, but when we come to Mrs. Pipchinses and having them put over us and keeping guard at your pa's door like crocodiles (only make us thankful that they lay no eggs!) we are a growing too outrageous!"

"Papa thinks well of Mrs. Pipchin, Susan," returned Florence, "and has a right to choose his housekeeper, you know. Pray don't!"

"Well, Miss Floy," returned the Nipper, "when you say 'don't,' I never do I hope, but Mrs. Pipchin acts like early gooseberries upon me miss, and nothing less."

Susan was unusually emphatic and destitute of punctuation in her discourse on this night, which was the night of Mr. Dombey's being brought home, because, having been sent down-stairs by Florence to inquire after him, she had been obliged to deliver her message to her mortal enemy, Mrs. Pipchin, who, without carrying it in to Mr. Dombey, had taken upon herself to return what Miss Nipper called a huffish answer, on her own responsibility. This Susan Nipper construed into presumption on the part of that exemplary sufferer by the Peruvian mines, and a deed of disparagement upon her young lady that was not to be forgiven; and so far her emphatic state was special. But she had been in a condition of greatly increased suspicion and distrust ever since the marriage; for like most persons of her quality of mind, who form a strong and sincere attachment to one in the different station which Florence occupied, Susan was very jealous, and her jealousy naturally attached to Edith, who divided her old empire, and came between them. Proud and glad as Susan Nipper truly was that her young mistress should be advanced towards her proper place in the scene of her old neglect, and that she should have her father's handsome wife for her companion and protectress, she could not relinquish any part of her own dominion to the handsome wife, without a grudge and a vague feeling of ill-will, for which she did not fail to find a disinterested justification in her sharp perception of the pride and passion of the lady's character. From the background to which she had necessarily retired somewhat since the marriage, Miss Nipper looked on, therefore, at domestic affairs in general, with a resolute conviction that no good would come of Mrs. Dombey: always being very careful to publish, on all possible occasions, that she had nothing to say against her.

"Susan," said Florence, who was sitting thoughtfully at her table, "it is very late. I shall want nothing more to-night."

"Ah, Miss Floy!" returned the Nipper, "I'm sure I often wish for them old times when I sat up with you hours later than this and fell asleep through being tired out when you was as broad awake as spectacles, but you've ma's-in-law to come and sit with you now Miss Floy and I'm thankful for it I'm sure. I've not a word to say against 'em."

"I shall not forget who was my old companion when I had none, Susan," returned Florence gently, "never!" And looking up, she put her arm round the neck of her humble friend, drew her face down to hers, and bidding her good night, kissed it; which so mollified Miss Nipper, that she fell a sobbing.

"Now my dear Miss Floy," said Susan, "let me go down-stairs again and see how your pa is, I know you're wretched about him, do let me go down-stairs again and knock at his door my own self."

"No," said Florence, "go to bed. We shall hear more in the morning. I will inquire myself in the morning. Mamma has been down, I dare say;" Florence blushed, for she had no such hope; "or is there now, perhaps. Good night!"

Susan was too much softened to express her private opinion on the probability of Mrs. Dombey's being in attendance on her husband; and silently withdrew. Florence, left alone, soon hid her head upon her hands, as she had often done in other days, and did not restrain the tears from coursing down her face. The misery of this domestic discord and unhappiness; the withered hope she cherished now, if hope it could be called, of ever being taken to her father's heart; her doubts and fears between the two; the yearning of her innocent breast to both; the heavy disappointment and regret of such an end as this to what had been a vision of bright hope and promise to her; all crowded on her mind, and made her tears flow fast. Her mother and her brother dead, her father unmoved towards her, Edith opposed to him and casting him away, but loving her, and loved by her, it seemed as if her affection could never prosper, rest where it would. That weak thought was soon hushed, but the thoughts in which it had arisen were too true and strong to be dismissed with it; and they made the night desolate.

Among such reflections there rose up, as there had risen up all day, the image of her father, wounded and in pain, alone in his own room, untended by those who should be nearest to him, and passing the tardy hours in lonely suffering. A frightened thought which made her start and clasp her hands—though it was not a

new one in her mind—that he might die, and never see her or pronounce her name, thrilled her whole frame. In her agitation she thought, and trembled while she thought, of once more stealing down-stairs, and venturing to his door.

She listened at her own. The house was quiet, and all the lights were out. It was a long, long time, she thought, since she used to make her nightly pilgrimages to his door! It was a long, long time, she tried to think, since she had entered his room at midnight, and he had led her back to the stair-foot!

With the same child's heart within her as of old: even with the child's sweet timid eyes and clustering hair: Florence, as strange to her father in her early maiden bloom as in her nursery time, crept down the staircase, listening as she went, and drew near to his room. No one was stirring in the house. The door was partly open to admit air; and all was so still within, that she could hear the burning of the fire, and count the ticking of the clock that stood upon the chimney-piece.

She looked in. In that room the house-keeper, wrapped in a blanket, was fast asleep in an easy-chair before the fire. The doors between it and the next were partly closed, and a screen was drawn before them; but there was a light there, and it shone upon the cornice of his bed. All was so very still that she could hear from his breathing that he was asleep. This gave her courage to pass round the screen, and look into his chamber.

It was as great a start to come upon his sleeping face as if she had not expected to see it. Florence stood arrested on the spot, and, if he had awakened then, must have remained there.

There was a cut upon his forehead, and they had been wetting his hair, which lay bedabbled and entangled on the pillow. One of his arms, resting outside the bed, was bandaged up, and he was very white. But it was not this that, after the first quick glance, and first assurance of his sleeping quietly, held Florence rooted to the ground. It was something very different from this; and more than this, that made him look so solemn in her eyes.

She had never seen his face in all her life, but there had been upon it—or she fancied so—some disturbing consciousness of her. She had never seen his face in all her life, but hope had sunk within her, and her timid glance had drooped before its stern, unloving, and repelling harshness. As she looked upon it now, she saw it, for the first time, free from the cloud that had darkened her childhood. Calm, tranquil night was reigning in its stead. He might have gone

to sleep, for anything she saw there, blessing her.

Awake, unkind father! Awake now, sullen man! The time is flitting by; the hour is coming with an angry tread. Awake!

There was no change upon his face; and as she watched it, awfully, its motionless repose recalled the faces that were gone. So they looked, so would he; so she, his weeping child, who should say when? so all the world of love and hatred and indifference around them! When that time should come, it would not be the heavier to him for this that she was going to do; and it might fall something lighter upon her.

She stole close to the bed, and, drawing in her breath, bent down, and softly kissed him on the face, and laid her own for one brief moment by its side, and put the arm, with which she dared not touch him, round about him on the pillow.

Awake, doomed man, while she is near! The time is flitting by; the hour is coming with an angry tread; its foot is in the house. Awake!

In her mind she prayed to God to bless her father, and to soften him towards her, if it might be so; and if not, to forgive him if he was wrong, and pardon her the prayer, which almost seemed impiety. And doing so, and looking back at him with blinded eyes, and stealing timidly away, passed out of his room, and crossed the other, and was gone.

He may sleep on now. He may sleep on while he may. But let him look for that slight figure when he wakes, and find it near him when the hour is come!

Sad and grieving was the heart of Florence as she crept up-stairs. The quiet house had grown more dismal since she came down. The sleep she had been looking on, in the dead of night, had the solemnity to her of death and life in one. The secrecy and silence of her own proceeding made the night secret, silent, and oppressive. She felt unwilling, almost unable, to go on to her own chamber; and turning into the drawing-rooms, where the clouded moon was shining through the blinds, looked out into the empty streets.

The wind was blowing drearily. The lamps looked pale, and shook as if they were cold. There was a distant glimmer of something that was not quite darkness, rather than of light, in the sky; and foreboding night was shivering and restless, as the dying are who make a troubled end. Florence remembered how, as a watcher by a sick bed, she had noted this bleak time; and felt its influence, as if in some hidden

natural antipathy to it; and now it was very, very gloomy.

Her mamma had not come to her room that night, which was one cause of her having sat late out of her bed. In her general uneasiness, no less than in her ardent longing to have somebody to speak to, and to break this spell of gloom and silence, Florence directed her steps towards the chamber where she slept.

The door was not fastened within, and yielded smoothly to her hesitating hand. She was surprised to find a bright light burning; still more surprised, on looking in, to see that her mamma, but partially undressed, was sitting near the ashes of the fire, which had crumbled and dropped away. Her eyes were intently bent upon the air; and in their light, and in her face, and in her form, and in the grasp with which she held the elbows of her chair as if about to start up, Florence saw such fierce emotion that it terrified her.

"Mamma!" she cried, "what is the matter?"

Edith started; looking at her with such a strange dread in her face, that Florence was more frightened than before.

"Mamma!" said Florence, hurriedly advancing. "Dear mamma! what is the matter?"

"I have not been well," said Edith, shaking, and still looking at her in the same strange way.

"I have had bad dreams, my love."

"And not yet been to bed, mamma?"

"No," she returned. "Half-waking dreams."

Her features gradually softened; and suffering Florence to come close to her, within her embrace, she said in a tender manner, "But what does my bird do here? What does my bird do here?"

"I have been uneasy, mamma, in not seeing you to-night, and in not knowing how papa was; and I——"

Florence stopped there, and said no more.

"Is it late?" asked Edith, fondly putting back the curls that mingled with her own dark hair, and strayed upon her face.

"Very late. Near day."

"Near day!" she repeated in surprise.

"Dear mamma, what have you done to your hand?" said Florence.

Edith drew it suddenly away, and, for a moment, looked at her with the same strange dread (there was a sort of wild avoidance in it) as before; but she presently said, "Nothing, nothing. A blow." And then she said, "My Florence!" And then her bosom heaved, and she was weeping passionately.

"Mamma!" said Florence. "Oh, mamma, what can I do, what should I do, to make us happier? Is there anything?"

"Nothing," she replied.

"Are you sure of that? Can it never be? If I speak now of what is in my thoughts, in spite of what we have agreed," said Florence, "you will not blame me, will you?"

"It is useless," she replied, "useless. I have told you, dear, that I have had bad dreams. Nothing can change them, or prevent their coming back."

"I do not understand," said Florence, gazing on her agitated face, which seemed to darken as she looked.

"I have dreamed," said Edith in a low voice, "of a pride that is life-powerless for good, all-powerful for evil; of a pride that has been galled and goaded, through many shameful years, and has never recoiled except upon itself; a pride that has debased its owner with the consciousness of deep humiliation, and never helped its owner boldly to resent it or avoid it, or to say, 'This shall not be!' a pride that, rightly guided, might have led perhaps to better things, but which, misdirected and perverted, like all else belonging to the same possessor, has been self-contempt, mere hardihood and ruin."

She neither looked nor spoke to Florence now, but went on as if she were alone.

"I have dreamed," she said, "of such indifference and callousness, arising from this self-contempt; this wretched, inefficient, miserable pride; that it has gone on with listless steps even to the altar, yielding to the old, familiar, beckoning finger,—oh, mother, oh, mother!—while it spurned it; and willing to be hateful to itself for once and for all, rather than to be stung daily in some new form. Mean, poor thing!"

And now, with gathering and darkening emotion, she looked as she had looked when Florence entered.

"And I have dreamed," she said, "that in a first late effort to achieve a purpose, it has been trodden on, and trodden down by a base foot, but turns and looks upon him. I have dreamed that it is wounded, hunted, set upon by dogs, but that it stands at bay, and will not yield; no, that it cannot if it would; but that it is urged on to hate him, rise against him, and defy him!"

Her clenched hand tightened on the trembling arm she had in hers, and, as she looked down on the alarmed and wondering face, her own subsided. "Oh, Florence!" she said, "I think I have been nearly mad to-night!" and humbled her proud head upon her neck, and wept again.

"Don't leave me! be near me! I have no hope but in you!" These words she said a score of times.

Soon she grew calmer, and was full of pity for the tears of Florence, and for her waking at such untimely hours. And the day now dawning, Edith folded her in her arms and laid her down upon her bed, and, not lying down herself, sat by her, and bade her try to sleep.

"For you are weary, dearest, and unhappy, and should rest."

"I am indeed unhappy, dear mamma, to-night," said Florence. "But you are weary and unhappy too."

"Not when you lie asleep so near me, sweet."

They kissed each other, and Florence, worn out, gradually fell into a gentle slumber; but, as her eyes closed on the face beside her, it was so sad to think upon the face down-stairs, that her hand drew closer to Edith for some comfort; yet, even in the act, it faltered, lest it should be deserting him. So, in her sleep, she tried to reconcile the two together, and to show them that she loved them both, but could not do it, and her waking grief was part of her dreams.

Edith, sitting by, looked down at the dark eyelashes lying wet on the flushed cheeks, and looked with gentleness and pity, for she knew the truth. But no sleep hung upon her own eyes. As the day came on she still sat watching and waking, with the placid hand in hers, and sometimes whispered, as she looked at the hushed face, "Be near me, Florence; I have no hope but in you!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SEPARATION.

WITH the day, though not so early as the sun, uprose Miss Susan Nipper. There was a heaviness in this young maiden's exceedingly sharp black eyes, that abated somewhat of their sparkling, and suggested—which was not their usual character—the possibility of their being sometimes shut. There was likewise a swollen look about them, as if they had been crying overnight. But the Nipper, so far from being cast down, was singularly brisk and bold, and all her energies appeared to be braced up for some great feat. This was noticeable even in her dress, which was much more tight and trim than usual; and in occasional twitches of her head as she went about the house, which were mightily expressive of determination.

In a word, she had formed a determination,

and an aspiring one: it being nothing less than this—to penetrate to Mr. Dombey's presence, and have speech of that gentleman alone. "I have often said I would," she remarked, in a threatening manner, to herself, that morning, with many twitches of her head, "and now I will!"

Spurring herself on to the accomplishment of this desperate design with a sharpness that was peculiar to herself, Susan Nipper haunted the hall and staircase during the whole forenoon, without finding a favourable opportunity for the assault. Not at all baffled by this discomfiture, which, indeed, had a stimulating effect, and put her on her mettle, she diminished nothing of her vigilance; and at last discovered, towards evening, that her sworn foe, Mrs. Pipchin, under pretence of having sat up all night, was dozing in her own room, and that Mr. Dombey was lying on his sofa unattended.

With a twitch—not of her head merely, this time, but of her whole self—the Nipper went on tiptoe to Mr. Dombey's door, and, knocked. "Come in!" said Mr. Dombey. Susan encouraged herself with a final twitch, and went in.

Mr. Dombey, who was eyeing the fire, gave an amazed look at his visitor, and raised himself a little on his arm. The Nipper dropped a curtsy.

"What do you want?" said Mr. Dombey.

"If you please, sir, I wish to speak to you," said Susan.

Mr. Dombey moved his lips as if he were repeating the words, but he seemed so lost in astonishment at the presumption of the young woman as to be incapable of giving them utterance.

"I have been in your service, sir," said Susan Nipper with her usual rapidity, "now twelve year a waiting on Miss Floy my own young lady who couldn't speak plain when I first come here and I was old in this house when Mrs. Richards was new, I may not be Meethosalem, but I am not a child in arms."

Mr. Dombey, raised upon his arm, and looking at her, offered no comment on this preparatory statement of facts.

"There never was a dearer or a blessedder young lady than is my young lady, sir," said Susan, "and I ought to know a great deal better than some for I have seen her in her grief and I have seen her in her joy (there's not been much of it) and I have seen her with her brother and I have seen her in her loneliness and some have never seen her, and I say to some and all—I do!" and here the black-eyed shook her head, and slightly stamped her foot: "that she's the

blessedest and dearest angel is Miss Floy that ever drew the breath of life, the more that I was torn to pieces sir the more I'd say it though I may not be a Fox's Martyr."

Mr. Dombey turned yet paler than his fall had made him with indignation and astonishment; and kept his eyes upon the speaker as if he accused them, and his ears too, of playing him false.

"No one could be anything but true and faithful to Miss Floy, sir," pursued Susan, "and I take no merit for my service of twelve year, for I love her—yes, I say to some and all I do!"—and here the black-eyed shook her head again, and slightly stamped her foot again, and checked a sob; "but true and faithful service gives me right to speak I hope, and speak I must and will now, right or wrong."

"What do you mean, woman?" said Mr. Dombey, glaring at her. "How do you dare?"

"What I mean, sir, is to speak respectful and without offence, but out, and how I dare I know not but I do!" said Susan. "Oh! you don't know my young lady sir you don't indeed, you'd never know so little of her, if you did."

Mr. Dombey, in a fury, put his hand out for the bell-rope; but there was no bell-rope on that side of the fire, and he could not rise and cross to the other without assistance. The quick eye of the Nipper detected his helplessness immediately, and now, as she afterwards observed, she felt she had got him.

"Miss Floy," said Susan Nipper, "is the most devoted and most patient and most dutiful and beautiful of daughters, there an't no gentleman, no sir, though as great and rich as all the greatest and richest of England put together, but might be proud of her and would and ought. If he knew her value right, he'd rather lose his greatness and his fortune piece by piece and beg his way in rags from door to door, I say to some and all, he would!" cried Susan Nipper, bursting into tears, "than bring the sorrow on her tender heart that I have seen it suffer in this house!"

"Woman," cried Mr. Dombey, "leave the room!"

"Begging your pardon, not even if I am to leave the situation, sir," replied the steadfast Nipper, "in which I have been so many years and seen so much—although I hope you'd never have the heart to send me from Miss Floy for such a cause—will I go now till I have said the rest, I may not be a Indian widow sir and I am not and I would not so become but if I once made up my mind to burn myself alive, I'd do it! And I've made my mind up to go on."

Which was rendered no less clear by the expression of Susan Nipper's countenance than by her words.

"There an't a person in your service, sir," pursued the black-eyed, "that has always stood more in awe of you than me and you may think how true it is when I make so bold as say that I have hundreds and hundreds of times thought of speaking to you and never been able to make my mind up to it till last night, but last night decided of me."

Mr. Dombey, in a paroxysm of rage, made another grasp at the bell-rope that was not there, and in its absence, pulled his hair rather than nothing.

"I have seen," said Susan Nipper, "Miss Floy strive and strive when nothing but a child so sweet and patient that the best of women might have copied from her, I've seen her sitting nights together half the night through to help her delicate brother with his learning, I've seen her helping him and watching him at other times—some well know when—I've seen her, with no encouragement and no help, grow up to be a lady, thank God! that is the grace and pride of every company she goes in, and I've always seen her cruelly neglected and keenly feeling of it—I say to some and all, I have!—and never said one word, but ordering one's self lowly and reverently towards one's betters, is not to be a worshipper of graven images, and I will and must speak!"

"Is there anybody there?" cried Mr. Dombey, calling out. "Where are the men? where are the women? Is there no one there?"

"I left my dear young lady out of bed late last night," said Susan, nothing checked, "and I knew why, for you was ill sir and she didn't know how ill and that was enough to make her wretched as I saw it did—I may not be a peacock; but I have my eyes—and I sat up a little in my own room, thinking she might be lonesome and might want me, and I saw her steal down-stairs and come to this door as if it was a guilty thing to look at her own pa, and then steal back again and go into them lonely drawing-rooms, a crying so, that I could hardly bear to hear it. *I can not bear to hear it*," said Susan Nipper, wiping her black eyes, and fixing them undauntedly on Mr. Dombey's infuriated face. "It's not the first time I have heard it, not by many and many a time you don't know your own daughter, sir, you don't know what you're doing, sir, I say to some and all," cried Susan Nipper, in a final burst, "that it's a sinful shame!"

"Why, hoity-toity!" cried the voice of Mrs.

Pipchin, as the black bombazine garments of that fair Peruvian Miner swept into the room. "What's this, indeed?"

Susan favoured Mrs. Pipchin with a look she had invented expressly for her when they first became acquainted, and resigned the reply to Mr. Dombey.

"What's this?" repeated Mr. Dombey, almost foaming. "What's this, madam? You who are at the head of this household, and bound to keep it in order, have reason to inquire. Do you know this woman?"

"I know very little good of her, sir," croaked Mrs. Pipchin. "How dare you come here, you hussy? Go along with you!"

But the inflexible Nipper, merely honouring Mrs. Pipchin with another look, remained.

"Do you call it managing this establishment, madam," said Mr. Dombey, "to leave a person like this at liberty to come and talk to me? A gentleman—in his own house—in his own room—assailed with the impertinences of women servants!"

"Well, sir," returned Mrs. Pipchin, with vengeance in her hard grey eye, "I exceedingly deplore it: nothing can be more irregular; nothing can be more out of all bounds and reason; but I regret to say, sir, that this young woman is quite beyond control. She has been spoiled by Miss Dombey, and is amenable to nobody. You know you're not," said Mrs. Pipchin sharply, and shaking her head at Susan Nipper. "For shame, you hussy! Go along with you!"

"If you find people in my service who are not to be controlled, Mrs. Pipchin," said Mr. Dombey, turning back towards the fire, "you know what to do with them, I presume. You know what you are here for? Take her away!"

"Sir, I know what to do," retorted Mrs. Pipchin, "and of course shall do it. Susan Nipper," snapping her up particularly short, "a month's warning from this hour."

"Oh indeed!" cried Susan loftily.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Pipchin, "and don't smile at me, you minx, or I'll know the reason why! Go along with you this minute!"

"I intend to go this minute, you may rely upon it," said the voluble Nipper. "I have been in this house waiting on my young lady a dozen year, and I won't stop in it one hour under notice from a person owning to the name of Pipchin, trust me, Mrs. P."

"A good riddance of bad rubbish!" said that wrathful old lady. "Get along with you, or I'll have you carried out!"

"My comfort is," said Susan, looking back at Mr. Dombey, "that I have told a piece of truth

this day which ought to have been told long before and can't be told too often or too plain and that no amount of Pipchinses—I hope the number of 'em mayn't be great"—(here Mrs. Pipchin uttered a very sharp "Go along with you!") and Miss Nipper repeated the look)—"can unsay what I have said, though they gave a whole year full of warnings beginning at ten o'clock in the forenoon and never leaving off till twelve at night and died of the exhaustion which would be a Jubilee!"

With these words Miss Nipper preceded her foe out of the room; and walking up-stairs to her own apartment in great state, to the choking exasperation of the ireful Pipchin, sat down among her boxes and began to cry.

From this soft mood she was soon aroused, with a very wholesome and refreshing effect, by the voice of Mrs. Pipchin outside the door.

"Does that bold-faced slut," said the fell Pipchin, "intend to take her warning, or does she not?"

Miss Nipper replied from within that the person described did not inhabit that part of the house, but that her name was Pipchin, and she was to be found in the housekeeper's room.

"You saucy baggage!" retorted Mrs. Pipchin, rattling at the handle of the door. "Go along with you this minute! Pack up your things directly! How dare you talk in this way to a gentlewoman who has seen better days?"

To which Miss Nipper rejoined, from her castle, that she pitied the better days that had seen Mrs. Pipchin; and that, for her part, she considered the worst days in the year to be about that lady's mark, except that they were much too good for her.

"But you needn't trouble yourself to make a noise at my door," said Susan Nipper, "nor to contaminate the keyhole with your eye, I'm packing up and going you may take your affidavit."

The dowager expressed her lively satisfaction at this intelligence, and with some general opinions upon young hussies as a race; and especially upon their demerits after being spoiled by Miss Dombey, withdrew to prepare the Nipper's wages. Susan then bestirred herself to get her trunks in order, that she might take an immediate and dignified departure; sobbing heartily all the time as she thought of Florence.

The object of her regret was not long in coming to her, for the news soon spread over the house that Susan Nipper had had a disturbance with Mrs. Pipchin, and that they had both appealed to Mr. Dombey, and that there had been an unprecedented piece of work in Mr.

Dombey's room, and that Susan was going. The latter part of this confused rumour Florence found to be so correct, that Susan had locked the last trunk, and was sitting upon it with her bonnet on, when she came into her room.

"Susan!" cried Florence. "Going to leave me! You!"

"Oh for goodness gracious sake, Miss Floy," said Susan, sobbing, "don't speak a word to me or I shall demean myself before them Pi-i-pchinses,

and I wouldn't have 'em see me cry Miss Floy for worlds!"

"Susan!" said Florence. "My dear girl, my old friend! What shall I do without you? Can you bear to go away so?"

"No-n-o-o, my darling dear Miss Floy, I can't indeed," sobbed Susan. "But it can't be helped, I've done my duty, miss, I have indeed. It's no fault of mine. I am quite resigned. I couldn't stay my month or I could never leave



"DO YOU CALL IT MANAGING THIS ESTABLISHMENT, MADAM," SAID MR. DOMBEY, "TO LEAVE A PERSON LIKE THIS AT LIBERTY TO COME AND TALK TO ME?"

you then my darling and I must at last as well as at first, don't speak to me Miss Floy, for though I'm pretty firm I'm not a marble door-post, my own dear."

"What is it? Why is it?" said Florence. "Won't you tell me?" For Susan was shaking her head.

"No-n-no,³ my darling," returned Susan. "Don't ask me, for I mustn't, and whatever you do don't put in a word for me to stop, for it couldn't be and you'd only wrong yourself,

and so God bless you my own precious and forgive me any harm I have done or any temper I have showed in all these many years!"

With which entreaty, very heartily delivered, Susan hugged her mistress in her arms.

"My darling there's a many that may come to serve you and be glad to serve you and who'll serve you well and true," said Susan, "but there can't be one who'll serve you so affectionate as me or love you half as dearly, that's my comfort. Go-ood-bye, sweet Miss Floy!"

Where will you go, Susan?" asked her weeping mistress.

"I've got a brother down in the country miss—a farmer in Essex," said the heart-broken Nipper, "that keeps ever so many co-o-ows and pigs and I shall go down there by the coach and sto-op with him, and don't mind me, for I've got money in the Savings Banks my dear, and needn't take another service just yet, which I couldn't, couldn't, couldn't do, my heart's own mistress!" Susan finished with a burst of sorrow, which was opportunely broken by the voice of Mrs. Pipchin talking down-stairs: on hearing which, she dried her red and swollen eyes, and made a melancholy feint of calling jauntily to Mr. Towlinson to fetch a cab and carry down her boxes.

Florence, pale and hurried and distressed, but withheld from useless interference, even here, by her dread of causing any new division between her father and his wife (whose stern, indignant face had been a warning to her a few moments since), and by her apprehension of being in some way unconsciously connected already with the dismissal of her old servant and friend, followed, weeping, down-stairs to Edith's dressing-room, whither Susan betook herself to make her parting curtsy.

"Now, here's the cab, and here's the boxes, get along with you, do!" said Mrs. Pipchin, presenting herself at the same moment. "I beg your pardon, ma'am, but Mr. Dombey's orders are imperative."

Edith, sitting under the hands of her maid—she was going out to dinner—preserved her haughty face, and took not the least notice.

"There's your money," said Mrs. Pipchin, who, in pursuance of her system, and in recollection of the Mines, was accustomed to rout the servants about, as she had routed her young Brighton boarders; to the everlasting acidulation of Master Bitherstone, "and the sooner this house sees your back the better."

Susan had no spirits even for the look that belonged to Mrs. Pipchin, by right; so she dropped her curtsy to Mrs. Dombey (who inclined her head without one word, and whose eye avoided every one but Florence), and gave one last parting hug to her young mistress, and received her parting embrace in return. Poor Susan's face at this crisis, in the intensity of her feelings and the determined suffocation of her sobs, lest one should become audible and be a triumph to Mrs. Pipchin, presented a series of the most extraordinary physiognomical phenomena ever witnessed.

"I beg your pardon, miss, I'm sure," said

Towlinson, outside the door with the boxes, addressing Florence, "but Mr. Toots is in the dining-room, and sends his compliments, and begs to know how Diogenes and master is."

Quick as thought, Florence glided out and hastened down-stairs, where Mr. Toots, in the most splendid vestments, was breathing very hard with doubt and agitation on the subject of her coming.

"Oh, how de do, Miss Dombey?" said Mr. Toots. "God bless my soul!"

This last ejaculation was occasioned by Mr. Toots's deep concern at the distress he saw in Florence's face: which caused him to stop short in a fit of chuckles, and become an image of despair.

"Dear Mr. Toots," said Florence, "you are so friendly to me, and so honest, that I am sure I may ask a favour of you."

"Miss Dombey," returned Mr. Toots, "if you'll only name one, you'll—you'll give me an appetite. To which," said Mr. Toots, with some sentiment, "I have long been a stranger."

"Susan, who is an old friend of mine, the oldest friend I have," said Florence, "is about to leave here suddenly, and quite alone, poor girl. She is going home, a little way into the country. Might I ask you to take care of her until she is in the coach?"

"Miss Dombey," returned Mr. Toots, "you really do me an honour and a kindness. This proof of your confidence, after the manner in which I was Beast enough to conduct myself, at Brighton——"

"Yes," said Florence hurriedly—"no—don't think of that. Then would you have the kindness to—to go?" and to be ready to meet her when she comes out? Thank you a thousand times! You ease my mind so much. She doesn't seem so desolate. You cannot think how grateful I feel to you, or what a good friend I am sure you are!" And Florence, in her earnestness, thanked him again and again; and Mr. Toots, in his earnestness, hurried away—but backwards, that he might lose no glimpse of her.

Florence had not the courage to go out when she saw poor Susan in the hall, with Mrs. Pipchin driving her forth, and Diogenes jumping about her, and terrifying Mrs. Pipchin to the last degree by making snaps at her bombazine skirts, and howling with anguish at the sound of her voice—for the good duenna was the dearest and most cherished aversion of his breast. But she saw Susan shake hands with the servants all round, and turn once to look at her old home—and she saw Diogenes bound out after the cab.

and want to follow it, and testify an impossibility of conviction that he had no longer any property in the fare; and the door was shut, and the hurry over, and her tears flowed fast for the loss of an old friend, whom no one could replace. No one. No one.

Mr. Toots, like the leal and trusty soul he was, stopped the cabriolet in a twinkling, and told Susan Nipper of his commission, at which she cried more than before.

"Upon my soul and body!" said Mr. Toots, taking his seat beside her, "I feel for you. Upon my word and honour, I think you can hardly know your own feelings better than I imagine them. I can conceive nothing more dreadful than to have to leave Miss Dombey."

Susan abandoned herself to her grief now, and it really was touching to see her.

"I say," said Mr. Toots, "now, don't! At least, I mean now do, you know!"

"Do what, Mr. Toots?" cried Susan.

"Why, come home to my place, and have some dinner before you start," said Mr. Toots. "My cook's a most respectable woman—one of the most motherly people I ever saw—and she'll be delighted to make you comfortable. Her son," said Mr. Toots as an additional recommendation, "was educated in the Blue-coat School, and blown up in a powder-mill."

Susan accepting this kind offer, Mr. Toots conducted her to his dwelling, where they were received by the matron in question, who fully justified his character of her, and by the Chicken, who at first supposed, on seeing a lady in the vehicle, that Mr. Dombey had been doubled up, agreeably to his old recommendation, and Miss Dombey abducted. This gentleman awakened in Miss Nipper some considerable astonishment; for, having been defeated by the Larkey Boy, his visage was in a state of such great dilapidation as to be hardly presentable in society with comfort to the beholders. The Chicken himself attributed this punishment to his having had the misfortune to get into Chancery early in the proceedings, when he was severely flogged by the Larkey One, and heavily grassed. But it appeared, from the published records of that great contest, that the Larkey Boy had had it all his own way from the beginning, and that the Chicken had been tapped, and bunged, and had received pepper, and had been made groggy, and had come up piping, and had endured a complication of similar strange inconveniences, until he had been gone into and finished.

After a good repast, and much hospitality, Susan set out for the coach-office in another

cabriolet, with Mr. Toots inside, as before, and the Chicken on the box, who, whatever distinction he conferred on the little party by the moral weight and heroism of his character, was scarcely ornamental to it, physically speaking, on account of his plasters; which were numerous. But the Chicken had registered a vow, in secret, that he would never leave Mr. Toots (who was secretly pining to get rid of him) for any less consideration than the good-will and fixtures of a public-house; and being ambitious to go into that line and drink himself to death as soon as possible, he felt it his cue to make his company unacceptable.

The night coach by which Susan was to go was on the point of departure. Mr. Toots, having put her inside, lingered by the window irresolutely until the driver was about to mount; when, standing on the step, and putting in a face that by the light of the lamp was anxious and confused, he said abruptly:

"I say, Susan! Miss Dombey, you know—"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think she could—you know—eh?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Toots," said Susan, "but I don't hear you."

"Do you think she could be brought, you know—not exactly at once, but in time—in a long time—to—to love me, you know? There!" said poor Mr. Toots.

"Oh dear no!" returned Susan, shaking her head. "I should say never. Ne—ver!"

"Thankee!" said Mr. Toots. "It's of no consequence. Good night. It's of no consequence, thankee!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TRUSTY AGENT.



DITH went out alone that day, and returned home early. It was but a few minutes after ten o'clock when her carriage rolled along the street in which she lived.

There was the same enforced composure on her face that there had been when she was dressing; and the wreath upon her head encircled the same cold and steady brow. But it would have been better to have seen its leaves and flowers rest into fragments by her passionate hand, or rendered shapeless by the fitful searches of a throbbing and bewildered brain for any resting-place, than

adorning such tranquillity. So obdurate, so unapproachable, so unrelenting, one would have thought that nothing could soften such a woman's nature, and that everything in life had hardened it.

Arrived at her own door, she was alighting, when some one coming quietly from the hall, and standing bareheaded, offered her his arm. The servant being thrust aside, she had no choice but to touch it; and she then knew whose arm it was.

"How is your patient, sir?" she said with a curled lip.

"He is better," returned Carker. "He is doing very well. I have left him for the night."

She bent her head, and was passing up the staircase, when he followed and said, speaking at the bottom:

"Madam! May I beg the favour of a minute's audience?"

She stopped and turned her eyes back. "It is an unseasonable time, sir, and I am fatigued. Is your business urgent?"

"It is very urgent," returned Carker. "As I am so fortunate as to have met you, let me press my petition."

She looked down for a moment at his glistening mouth, and he looked up at her, standing above him in her stately dress, and thought again, how beautiful she was.

"Where is Miss Dombey?" she asked the servant aloud.

"In the morning room, ma'am."

"Show the way, there!" Turning her eyes again on the attentive gentleman at the bottom of the stairs, and informing him, with a slight motion of her head, that he was at liberty to follow, she passed on.

"I beg your pardon! madam! Mrs. Dombey!" cried the soft and nimble Carker, at her side in a moment. "May I be permitted to entreat that Miss Dombey is not present?"

She confronted him with a quick look, but with the same self-possession and steadiness.

"I would spare Miss Dombey," said Carker in a low voice, "the knowledge of what I have to say. At least, madam, I would leave it to you to decide whether she shall know of it or not. I owe that to you. It is my bounden duty to you. After our former interview, it would be monstrous in me if I did otherwise."

She slowly withdrew her eyes from his face, and turning to the servant, said, "Some other room." He led the way to a drawing-room, which he speedily lighted up, and then left them. While he remained, not a word was spoken, Edith enthroned herself upon a couch

by the fire; and Mr. Carker, with his hat in his hand, and his eyes bent upon the carpet, stood before her, at some little distance.

"Before I hear you, sir," said Edith when the door was closed, "I wish you to hear me."

"To be addressed by Mrs. Dombey," he returned, "even in accents of unmerited reproach, is an honour I so greatly esteem, that, although I were not her servant in all things, I should defer to such a wish most readily."

"If you are charged by the man whom you have just now left, sir,"—Mr. Carker raised his eyes, as if he were going to counterfeit surprise, but she met them, and stopped him, if such were his intention,—"with any message to me, do not attempt to deliver it, for I will not receive it. I need scarcely ask you if you are come on such an errand. I have expected you some time."

"It is my misfortune," he replied, "to be here, wholly against my will, for such a purpose. Allow me to say that I am here for two purposes. That is one."

"That one, sir," she returned, "is ended. Or, if you return to it—"

"Can Mrs. Dombey believe," said Carker, coming nearer, "that I would return to it in the face of her prohibition? Is it possible that Mrs. Dombey, having no regard to my unfortunate position, is so determined to consider me inseparable from my instructor as to do me great and wilful injustice?"

"Sir," returned Edith, bending her dark gaze full upon him, and speaking with a rising passion that inflated her proud nostril and her swelling neck, and stirred the delicate white down upon a robe she wore, thrown loosely over shoulders that could bear its snowy neighbourhood, "why do you present yourself to me as you have done, and speak to me of love and duty to my husband, and pretend to think that I am happily married, and that I honour him? How dare you venture so to affront me, when you know—I do not know better, sir: I have seen it in your every glance, and heard it in your every word—that, in place of affection between us, there is aversion and contempt, and that I despise him hardly less than I despise myself for being his? Injustice! If I had done justice to the torment you have made me feel, and to my sense of the insult you have put upon me, I should have slain you!"

She had asked him why he did this. Had she not been blinded by her pride and wrath, and self-humiliation,—which she was, fiercely as she bent her gaze upon him,—she would have seen the answer in his face. To bring her to this declaration.

She saw it not, and cared not whether it was there or no. She saw only the indignities and struggles she had undergone, and had to undergo, and was writhing under then. As she sat looking fixedly at them, rather than at him,

she plucked the feathers from a pinion of some rare and beautiful bird, which hung from her waist by a golden thread, to serve her as a fan, and rained them on the ground.

He did not shrink beneath her gaze, but



"MISS DOMBEY," RETURNED MR. TOOTS, "IF YOU'LL ONLY NAME ONE, YOU'LL—YOU'LL GIVE ME AN APPETITE. TO WHICH," SAID MR. TOOTS, WITH SOME SENTIMENT, "I HAVE LONG BEEN A STRANGER."

stood, until such outward signs of her anger as had escaped her control subsided, with the air of a man who had his sufficient reply in reserve, and would presently deliver it. And he then spoke, looking straight into her kindling eyes.

"Madam," he said, "I know, and knew before

to-day, that I have found no favour with you; and I knew why. Yes. I knew why. You have spoken so openly to me; I am so relieved by the possession of your confidence——"

"Confidence!" she repeated with disdain.

He passed it over.

"—That I will make no pretence of concealment. I *did* see, from the first, that there was no affection on your part for Mr. Dombey—how could it possibly exist between such different subjects? And I *have* seen, since, that stronger feelings than indifference have been engendered in your breast—how could that possibly be otherwise, either, circumstanced as you have been? But was it for me to presume to avow this knowledge to you in so many words?"

"Was it for you, sir," she replied, "to feign that other belief, and audaciously to thrust it on me day by day?"

"Madam, it was," he eagerly retorted:—"If I had done less, if I had done anything but that, I should not be speaking to you thus; and I foresaw—who could better foresee, for who has had greater experience of Mr. Dombey than myself?—that unless your character should prove to be as yielding and obedient as that of his first submissive lady, which I did not believe——"

A haughty smile gave him reason to observe that he might repeat this.

"I say, which I did not believe,—the time was likely to come when such an understanding as we have now arrived at would be serviceable."

"Serviceable to whom, sir?" she demanded scornfully.

"To you. I will not add to myself, as warning me to refrain even from that limited commendation of Mr. Dombey, in which I can honestly indulge, in order that I may not have the misfortune of saying anything distasteful to one whose aversion and contempt," with great expression, "are so keen."

"It is honest in you, sir," said Edith, "to confess to your 'limited commendation,' and to speak in that tone of disparagement, even of him: being his chief counsellor and flatterer."

"Counsellor—yes," said Carker. "Flatterer—no. A little reservation I fear I must confess to. But our interest and convenience commonly oblige many of us to make professions that we cannot feel. We have partnerships of interest and convenience, friendships of interest and convenience, dealings of interest and convenience, marriages of interest and convenience, every day."

She bit her blood-red lip; but without wavering in the dark, stern watch she kept upon him.

"Madam," said Mr. Carker, sitting down in a chair that was near her, with an air of the most profound and most considerate respect, "why should I hesitate now, being altogether devoted to your service, to speak plainly? It was natural that a lady endowed as you are should think it

feasible to change her husband's character in some respects, and mould him to a better form."

"It was not natural to *me*, sir," she rejoined. "I had never any expectation or intention of that kind."

The proud, undaunted face showed him it was resolute to wear no mask he offered, but was set upon a reckless disclosure of itself, indifferent to any aspect in which it might present itself, to such as he.

"At least it was natural," he resumed, "that you should deem it quite possible to live with Mr. Dombey as his wife, at once without submitting to him, and without coming into such violent collision with him. But, madam, you did not know Mr. Dombey (as you have since ascertained), when you thought that: 'You did not know how exacting and how proud he is, or how he is, if I may say so, the slave of his own greatness, and goes yoked to his own triumphal car like a beast of burden, with no idea on earth but that it is behind him, and is to be drawn on, over everything and through everything.'"

His teeth gleamed through his malicious relish of this conceit as he went on talking.

"Mr. Dombey is really capable of no more true consideration for you, madam, than for me. The comparison is an extreme one; I intend it to be so; but quite just. Mr. Dombey, in the plenitude of his power, asked me—I had it from his own lips yesterday morning—to be his go-between to you, because he knows I am not agreeable to you, and because he intends that I shall be a punishment for your contumacy; and, besides that, because he really does consider that I, his paid servant, am an ambassador whom it is derogatory to the dignity—not of the lady to whom I have the happiness of speaking; she has no existence in his mind—but of his wife, a part of himself, to receive. You may imagine how regardless of me, how obtuse to the possibility of my having any individual sentiment or opinion he is, when he tells me, openly, that I am so employed. You know how perfectly indifferent to your feelings he is when he threatens you with such a messenger. As you, of course, have not forgotten that he did."

She watched him still attentively. But he watched her too; and he saw that this indication of a knowledge, on his part, of something that had passed between herself and her husband, rankled and smarted in her haughty breast like a poisoned arrow.

"I do not recall all this to widen the breach between yourself and Mr. Dombey, madam—Heaven forbid! what would it profit me?—but as an example of the hopelessness of impressing

Mr. Dombey with a sense that anybody is to be considered when he is in question. We who are about him have, in our various positions, done our part, I dare say, to confirm him in his way of thinking; but, if we had not done so, others would—or they would not have been about him; and it has always been, from the beginning, the very staple of his life. Mr. Dombey has had to deal, in short, with none but submissive and dependent persons, who have bowed the knee, and bent the neck, before him. He has never known what it is to have angry pride and strong resentment opposed to him."

"But he will know it now!" she seemed to say; though her lips did not part, nor her eyes falter. He saw the soft down tremble once again, and he saw her lay the plumage of the beautiful bird against her bosom for a moment; and he unfolded one more ring of the coil into which he had gathered himself.

"Mr. Dombey, though a most honourable gentleman," he said, "is so prone to pervert even facts to his own view, when he is at all opposed, in consequence of the warp in his mind, that he—can I give a better instance than this?—he sincerely believes (you will excuse the folly of what I am about to say; it not being mine) that his severe expression of opinion to his present wife, on a certain special occasion she may remember, before the lamented death of Mrs. Skewton, produced a withering effect, and for the moment quite subdued her!"

Edith laughed. How harshly and unmusically need not be described. It is enough that he was glad to hear her.

"Madam," he resumed, "I have done with this. Your own opinions are so strong, and, I am persuaded, so unalterable," he repeated those words slowly and with great emphasis, "that I am almost afraid to incur your displeasure anew when I say that, in spite of these defects and my full knowledge of them, I have become habituated to Mr. Dombey, and esteem him. But when I say so, it is not, believe me, for the mere sake of vaunting a feeling that is so utterly at variance with your own, and for which you can have no sympathy"—oh, how distinct, and plain, and emphasized this was!—"but to give you an assurance of the zeal with which, in this unhappy matter, I am yours, and the indignation with which I regard the part I am required to fill!"

She sat as if she were afraid to take her eyes from his face.

And now to unwind the last ring of the coil.

"It is growing late," said Carker after a pause, "and you are, as you said, fatigued. But the

second object of this interview I must not forget. I must recommend you, I must entreat you in the most earnest manner, for sufficient reasons that I have, to be cautious in your demonstrations of regard for Miss Dombey."

"Cautious! What do you mean?"

"To be careful how you exhibit too much affection for that young lady."

"Too much affection, sir?" said Edith, knitting her broad brow and rising. "Who judges my affection, or measures it out? You?"

"It is not I who do so." He was, or feigned to be, perplexed.

"Who then?"

"Can you not guess who then?"

"I do not choose to guess," she answered.

"Madam," he said after a little hesitation; meantime they had been, and still were, regarding each other as before; "I am in a difficulty here. You have told me you will receive no message, and you have forbidden me to return to that subject; but the two subjects are so closely entwined, I find, that, unless you will accept this vague caution from one who has now the honour to possess your confidence, though the way to it has been through your displeasure, I must violate the injunction you have laid upon me."

"You know that you are free to do so, sir," said Edith. "Do it."

So pale, so trembling, so impassioned! He had not miscalculated the effect, then!

"His instructions were," he said in a low voice, "that I should inform you that your demeanour towards Miss Dombey is not agreeable to him. That it suggests comparisons to him which are not favourable to himself. That he desires it may be wholly changed; and that, if you are in earnest, he is confident it will be; for your continued show of affection will not benefit its object."

"That is a threat," she said.

"That is a threat," he answered in his voiceless manner of assent: adding aloud, "But not directed against *you*."

Proud, erect, and dignified, as she stood confronting him; and looking through him, as she did, with her full bright flashing eye; and smiling, as she was, with scorn and bitterness; she sunk as if the ground had dropped beneath her, and in an instant would have fallen on the floor, but that he caught her in his arms. As instantaneously she threw him off, the moment that he touched her, and, drawing back, confronted him again, immovable, with her hand stretched out.

"Please to leave me. Say no more to-night."

"I feel the urgency of this," said Mr. Carker, "because it is impossible to say what unforeseen consequences might arise, or how soon, from your being unacquainted with his state of mind. I understand Miss Dombey is concerned, now, at the dismissal of her old servant, which is likely to have been a minor consequence in itself. You don't blame me for requesting that Miss Dombey might not be present. May I hope so?"

"I do not. Please to leave me, sir."

"I knew that your regard for the young lady, which is very sincere and strong, I am well persuaded, would render it a great unhappiness to you ever to be a prey to the reflection that you had injured her position and ruined her future hopes," said Carker hurriedly, but eagerly.

"No more to-night. Leave me, if you please."

"I shall be here constantly in my attendance upon him, and in the transaction of business matters. You will allow me to see you again, and to consult what should be done, and learn your wishes?"

She motioned him towards the door.

"I cannot even decide whether to tell him I have spoken to you yet; or to lead him to suppose that I have deferred doing so, for want of opportunity, or for any other reason. It will be necessary that you should enable me to consult with you very soon."

"At any time but now," she answered.

"You will understand, when I wish to see you, that Miss Dombey is not to be present; and that I seek an interview as one who has the happiness to possess your confidence, and who comes to render you every assistance in his power, and, perhaps, on many occasions, to ward off evil from her?"

Looking at him still with the same apparent dread of releasing him for a moment from the influence of her steady gaze, whatever that might be, she answered, "Yes!" and once more bade him go.

He bowed, as if in compliance; but, turning back when he had nearly reached the door, said:

"I am forgiven, and have explained my fault. May I—for Miss Dombey's sake, and for my own—take your hand before I go?"

She gave him the gloved hand she had maimed last night. He took it in one of his, and kissed it and withdrew. And when he had closed the door, he waved the hand with which he had taken hers, and thrust it in his breast.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RECOGNIZANT AND REFLECTIVE.



AMONG sundry minor alterations in Mr. Carker's life and habits that began to take place at this time, none was more remarkable than the extraordinary diligence with which he applied himself to business, and the closeness with which he investigated every detail that the affairs of the House laid open to him. Always active and penetrating in such matters, his lynx-eyed vigilance now increased twenty-fold. Not only did his weary watch keep pace with every present point that every day presented to him in some new form, but, in the midst of these engrossing occupations, he found leisure—that is, he made it—to review the past transactions of the Firm, and his share in them, during a long series of years. Frequently, when the clerks were all gone, the offices dark and empty, and all similar places of business shut up, Mr. Carker, with the whole anatomy of the iron room laid bare before him, would explore the mysteries of books and papers, with the patient progress of a man who was dissecting the minutest nerves and fibres of his subject. Perch, the messenger, who usually remained on these occasions, to entertain himself with the perusal of the Price Current by the light of 'one candle, or to doze over the fire in the outer office, at the imminent risk every moment of diving head foremost into the coal-box; could not withhold the tribute of his admiration from this zealous conduct, although it much contracted his domestic enjoyments; and again and again expatiated to Mrs. Perch (now nursing twins) on the industry and acuteness of their managing gentleman in the City.

The same increased and sharp attention that Mr. Carker bestowed on the business of the House he applied to his own personal affairs. Though not a partner in the concern—a distinction hitherto reserved solely to inheritors of the great name of Dombey—he was in the receipt of some per-centage on its dealings; and, participating in all its facilities for the employment of money to advantage, was considered, by the minnows among the tritons of the East, a rich man. It began to be said, among these shrewd observers, that Jem Carker, of Dombey's, was looking about him to see what he was worth; and that he was calling in his money at a good time, like the long-headed fellow he was; and bets were even offered on the Stock Exchange that Jem was going to marry a rich widow.

Yet these cares did not in the least interfere with Mr. Carker's watching of his chief, or with his cleanness, neatness, sleekness, or any cat-like quality he possessed. It was not so much that there was a change in him in reference to any of his habits, as that the whole man was intensified. Everything that had been observable in him before was observable now, but with a greater amount of concentration. He did each single thing as if he did nothing else—a pretty certain indication, in a man of that range of ability and purpose, that he is doing something which sharpens and keeps alive his keenest powers.

The only decided alteration in him was, that as he rode to and fro along the streets, he would fall into deep fits of musing, like that in which he had come away from Mr. Dombey's house on the morning of that gentleman's disaster. At such times he would keep clear of the obstacles in his way mechanically; and would appear to see and hear nothing until arrival at his destination, or some sudden chance or effort roused him.

Walking his white-legged horse thus to the counting-house of Dombey and Son one day, he was as unconscious of the observation of two pairs of women's eyes, as of the fascinated orbs of Rob the Grinder, who, in waiting a street's length from the appointed place, as a demonstration of punctuality, vainly touched and re-touched his hat to attract attention, and trotted along on foot by his master's side, prepared to hold his stirrup when he should alight.

"See where he goes!" cried one of these two women, an old creature, who stretched out her shrivelled arm to point him out to her companion, a young woman, who stood close beside her, withdrawn, like herself, into a gateway.

Mrs. Brown's daughter looked out at this bidding on the part of Mrs. Brown; and there were wrath and vengeance in her face.

"I never thought to look at him again," she said in a low voice; "but it's well I should, perhaps. I see. I see!"

"Not changed!" said the old woman, with a look of eager malice.

"He changed!" returned the other. "What for? What has he suffered? There is change enough for twenty in me. Isn't that enough?"

"See where he goes!" muttered the old woman, watching her daughter with her red eyes; "so easy and so trim, a-horseback, while we are in the mud——"

"And of it," said her daughter impatiently. "We are mud underneath his horse's feet. What should we be?"

In the intentness with which she looked

after him again, she made a hasty gesture with her hand when the old woman began to reply, as if her view could be obstructed by mere sound. Her mother watching her, and not him, remained silent; until her kindling glance subsided, and she drew a long breath, as if in the relief of his being gone.

"Deary!" said the old woman then. "Alice! Handsome gal! Ally!" She gently shook her sleeve to arouse her attention. "Will you let him go like that, when you can wring money from him? Why, it's a wickedness, my daughter."

"Haven't I told you that I will not have money from him?" she returned. "And don't you yet believe me? Did I take his sister's money? Would I touch a penny, if I knew it, that had gone through his white hands—unless it was, indeed, that I could poison it, and send it back to him? Peace, mother, and come away."

"And him so rich?" murmured the old woman. "And us so poor!"

"Poor in not being able to pay him any of the harm we owe him," returned her daughter. "Let him give me that sort of riches, and I'll take them from him and use them. Come away. It's no good looking at his horse. Come away, mother!"

But the old woman, for whom the spectacle of Rob the Grinder returning down the street, leading the riderless horse, appeared to have some extraneous interest that it did not possess in itself, surveyed that young man with the utmost earnestness; and seeming to have whatever doubts she entertained resolved as he drew nearer, glanced at her daughter with brightened eyes, and with her finger on her lip, and emerging from the gateway at the moment of his passing, touched him on the shoulder.

"Why, where's my sprightly Rob been all this time?" she said as he turned round.

The sprightly Rob, whose sprightliness was very much diminished by the salutation, looked exceedingly dismayed, and said, with the water rising in his eyes:

"Oh! why can't you leave a poor cove alone, Misses Brown, when he's getting an honest livelihood and conducting himself respectable? What do you come and deprive a cove of his character for, by talking to him in the streets, when he's taking his master's horse to a honest stable—a horse you'd go and sell for cat's and dog's meat if you had *your* way? Why, I thought," said the Grinder, producing his concluding remark as if it were the climax of all his injuries, "that you was dead long ago!"

"This is the way," cried the old woman, appealing to her daughter, "that he talks to me, who knew him weeks and months together, my deary, and have stood his friend many and many a time among the pigeon-fancying tramps and bird-catchers."

"Let the birds be, will you, Misses Brown?" retorted Rob in a tone of the acutest anguish. "I think a cove had better have to do with lions than them little creeturs, for they're always flying back in your face when you least expect it. Well, how d'ye do, and what do you want?" These polite inquiries the Grinder uttered as it were under protest, and with great exasperation and vindictiveness.

"Hark how he speaks to an old friend, my deary!" said Mrs. Brown, again appealing to her daughter. "But there's some of his old friends not so patient as me. If I was to tell some that he knows, and has sported and cheated with, where to find him——"

"Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?" interrupted the miserable Grinder, glancing quickly round, as though he expected to see his master's teeth shining at his elbow. "What do you take a pleasure in ruining a cove for? At your time of life, too! when you ought to be thinking of a variety of things!"

"What a gallant horse!" said the old woman, patting the animal's neck.

"Let him alone, will you, Misses Brown?" cried Rob, pushing away her hand. "You're enough to drive a penitent cove mad!"

"Why, what hurt do I do him, child?" returned the old woman.

"Hurt!" said Rob. "He's got a master that would find it out if he was touched with a straw." And he blew upon the place where the old woman's hand had rested for a moment, and smoothed it gently with his finger, as if he seriously believed what he said.

The old woman, looking back to mumble and mouth at her daughter, who followed, kept close to Rob's heels as he walked on with the bridle in his hand; and pursued the conversation.

"A good place, Rob, eh?" said she. "You're in luck, my child."

"Oh, don't talk about luck, Misses Brown," returned the wretched Grinder, facing round and stopping. "If you'd never come, or if you'd go away, then indeed a cove might be considered tolerable lucky. Can't you go along, Misses Brown, and not foller me?" blubbered Rob with sudden defiance. "If the young woman's a friend of yours, why don't she take you away, instead of letting you make yourself so disgraceful?"

"What!" croaked the old woman, putting her face close to his, with a malevolent grin upon it that puckered up the loose skin down in her very throat. "Do you deny your old chum? Have you lurked to my house fifty times, and slept sound in a corner when you had no other bed but the paving-stones, and do you talk to me like this? Have I bought and sold with you, and helped you in my way of business, school-boy, sneak, and what not, and do you tell me to go along? Could I raise a crowd of old company about you to-morrow morning, that would follow you to ruin like copies of your own shadow, and do you turn on me with your bold looks? I'll go. Come, Alice."

"Stop, Misses Brown!" cried the distracted Grinder. "What are you doing of? Don't put yourself in a passion! Don't let her go, if you please. I haven't meant any offence. I said 'How d'ye do' at first, didn't I? But you wouldn't answer. How do you do? Besides," said Rob piteously, "look here! How can a cove stand talking in the street with his master's präd a wanting to be took to be rubbed down, and his master up to every individdle thing that happens?"

The old woman made a show of being partially appeased, but shook her head, and mouthed and muttered still.

"Come along to the stables, and have a glass of something that's good for you, Misses Brown, can't you," said Rob, "instead of going on like that, which is no good to you, nor anybody else? Come along with her, will you be so kind?" said Rob. "I'm sure I'm delighted to see her, if it wasn't for the horse!"

With this apology, Rob turned away, a rueful picture of despair, and walked his charge down a by-street. The old woman, mouthing at her daughter, followed close upon him. The daughter followed.

Turning into a silent little square or courtyard that had a great church tower rising above it, and a packer's warehouse and a bottle-maker's warehouse for its places of business, Rob the Grinder delivered the white-legged horse to the hostler of a quaint stable at the corner; and inviting Mrs. Brown and her daughter to seat themselves upon a stone bench at the gate of that establishment, soon reappeared from a neighbouring public-house with a pewter measure and a glass.

"Here's master—Mr. Carker, child!" said the old woman slowly, as her sentiment before drinking. "Lord bless him!"

"Why, I didn't tell you who he was," observed Rob with staring eyes.

"We know him by sight," said Mrs. Brown, whose working mouth and nodding head stopped for the moment, in the fixedness of her attention. "We saw him pass this morning, afore he got off his horse; when you were ready to take it."

"Ay, ay?" returned Rob, appearing to wish that his readiness had carried him to any other place.—"What's the matter with her? Won't she drink?"

This inquiry had reference to Alice, who, folded in her cloak, sat a little apart, profoundly inattentive to his offer of the replenished glass.

The old woman shook her head. "Don't mind her," she said; "she's a strange creetur, if you knowed her, Rob. But Mr. Carker—"

"Hush!" said Rob, glancing cautiously up at the packer's and at the bottle-maker's, as if, from any one of the tiers of warehouses, Mr. Carker might be looking down. "Softly."

"Why, he ain't here!" cried Mrs. Brown.

"I don't know that," muttered Rob, whose glance even wandered to the church tower, as if he might be there, with a supernatural power of hearing.

"Good master?" inquired Mrs. Brown.

Rob nodded; and added, in a low voice, "Precious sharp."

"Lives out of town, don't he, lovey?" said the old woman.

"When he's at home," returned Rob; "but we don't live at home just now."

"Where then?" asked the old woman.

"Lodgings; up near Mr. Dombey's," returned Rob.

The younger woman fixed her eyes so searchingly upon him, and so suddenly, that Rob was quite confounded, and offered the glass again, but with no more effect upon her than before.

"Mr. Dombey—you and I used to talk about him sometimes, you know," said Rob to Mrs. Brown. "You used to get me to talk about him."

The old woman nodded.

"Well, Mr. Dombey, he's had a fall from his horse," said Rob unwillingly; "and my master has to be up there more than usual, either with him, or Mrs. Dombey, or some of 'em; and so we've come to town."

"Are they good friends, lovey?" asked the old woman.

"Who?" retorted Rob.

"He and she."

"What, Mr. and Mrs. Dombey?" said Rob.

"How should I know?"

"Not them—master and Mrs. Dombey, chick," replied the old woman coaxingly.

"I don't know," said Rob, looking round him again. "I suppose so. How curious you are, Misses Brown! Least said, soonest mended."

"Why, there's no harm in it!" exclaimed the old woman, with a laugh and a clap of her hands. "Sprightly Rob has grown tame since he has been well off! There's no harm in it."

"No, there's no harm in it, I know," returned Rob, with the same distrustful glance at the packer's and the bottle-maker's, and the church; "but blabbing, if it's only about the number of buttons on my master's coat, won't do. I tell you it won't do with him. A cove had better drown himself. He says so. I shouldn't have so much as told you what his name was, if you hadn't known it. Talk about somebody else."

As Rob took another cautious survey of the yard, the old woman made a secret motion to her daughter. It was momentary, but the daughter, with a slight look of intelligence, withdrew her eyes from the boy's face, and sat folded in her cloak as before.

"Rob, lovey!" said the old woman, beckoning him to the other end of the bench. "You were always a pet and favourite of mine. Now, weren't you? Don't you know you were?"

"Yes, Misses Brown," replied the Grinder, with a very bad grace.

"And you could leave me!" said the old woman, flinging her arms about his neck. "You could go away, and grow almost out of knowledge, and never come to tell your poor old friend how fortunate you were, proud lad! Oho, oho!"

"Oh, here's a dreadful go for a cove that's got a master wide awake in the neighbourhood!" exclaimed the wretched Grinder. "To be howled over like this here!"

"Won't you come and see me, Robby?" cried Mrs. Brown. "Oho, won't you ever come and see me?"

"Yes, I tell you! Yes, I will!" returned the Grinder.

"That's my own Rob! That's my lovey!" said Mrs. Brown, drying the tears upon her shrivelled face, and giving him a tender squeeze. "At the old place, Rob?"

"Yes," returned the Grinder.

"Soon, Robby dear?" cried Mrs. Brown, "and often?"

"Yes, yes, yes," replied Rob. "I will, indeed, upon my soul and body."

"And then," said Mrs. Brown, with her arms uplifted towards the sky, and her head thrown back and shaking, "if he's true to his word, I'll never come a-near him, though I know where

he is, and never breathe a syllable about him! Never!"

This ejaculation seemed a drop of comfort to the miserable Grinder, who shook Mrs. Brown by the hand upon it, and implored her, with tears in his eyes, to leave a cove, and not destroy his prospects. Mrs. Brown, with another fond embrace, assented; but, in the act of following her daughter, turned back, with her finger stealthily raised, and asked in a hoarse whisper for some money.

"A shilling, dear!" she said, with her eager, avaricious face, "or sixpence! For old acquaintance' sake. I'm so poor. And my handsome gal!"—looking over her shoulder—"she's my gal, Rob—half starves me."

But, as the reluctant Grinder put it in her hand, her daughter, coming quietly back, caught the hand in hers, and twisted out the coin.

"What," she said, "mother! always money! money from the first, and to the last! Do you mind so little what I said but now? Here. Take it!"

The old woman uttered a moan as the money was restored, but without in any other way opposing its restoration, hobbled at her daughter's side out of the yard, and along the by-street upon which it opened. The astonished and dismayed Rob, staring after them, saw that they stopped, and fell to earnest conversation very soon; and more than once observed a darkly-threatening action of the younger woman's hand (obviously having reference to some one of whom they spoke), and a crooning, feeble imitation of it on the part of Mrs. Brown, that made him earnestly hope he might not be the subject of their discourse.

With the present consolation that they were gone, and with the prospective comfort that Mrs. Brown could not live for ever, and was not likely to live long to trouble him, the Grinder, not otherwise regretting his misdeeds than as they were attended with such disagreeable incidental consequences, composed his ruffled features to a more serene expression by thinking of the admirable manner in which he had disposed of Captain Cuttle (a reflection that seldom failed to put him in a flow of spirits), and went to the Dombey counting-house to receive his master's orders.

There his master, so subtle and vigilant of eye that Rob quaked before him, more than half expecting to be taxed with Mrs. Brown, gave him the usual morning's box of papers for Mr. Dombey, and a note for Mrs. Dombey: merely nodding his head as an enjoiner to be careful, and to use dispatch—a mysterious admonition,

fraught, in the Grinder's imagination, with dismal warnings and threats; and more powerful with him than any words.

Alone again in his own room, Mr. Carker applied himself to work, and worked all day. He saw many visitors; overlooked a number of documents; went in and out, to and from, sundry places of mercantile resort; and indulged in no more abstraction until the day's business was done. But, when the usual clearance of papers from his table was made at last, he fell into his thoughtful mood once more.

He was standing in his accustomed place and attitude, with his eyes intently fixed upon the ground, when his brother entered to bring back some letters that had been taken out in the course of the day. He put them quietly on the table, and was going immediately, when Mr. Carker the manager, whose eyes had rested on him, on his entrance, as if they had all this time had him for the subject of their contemplation, instead of the office floor, said:

"Well, John Carker, and what brings you here?"

His brother pointed to the letters, and was again withdrawing.

"I wonder," said the manager, "that you can come and go without inquiring how our master is."

"We had word this morning, in the counting-house, that Mr. Dombey was doing well," replied his brother.

"You are such a meek fellow," said the manager with a smile,—“but you have grown so, in the course of years,—that if any harm came to him, you'd be miserable, I dare swear now.”

"I should be truly sorry, James," returned the other,

"He would be sorry!" said the manager, pointing at him, as if there were some other person present to whom he was appealing. "He would be truly sorry! This brother of mine! This junior of the place, this slighted piece of lumber, pushed aside with his face to the wall, like a rotten picture, and left so, for Heaven knows how many years; *he's* all gratitude and respect, and devotion too, he would have me believe!"

"I would have you believe nothing, James," returned the other. "Be as just to me as you would to any other man below you. You ask a question, and I answer it."

"And have you nothing, spanier," said the manager, with unusual irascibility, "to complain of in him? No proud treatment to resent, no insolence, no foolery of state, no exaction of any sort? What the devil! are you man or mouse?"

"It would be strange if any two persons could be together for so many years, especially as superior and inferior, without each having something to complain of in the other—as he thought, at all events," replied John Carker. "But, apart from my history here——"

"His history here!" exclaimed the manager. "Why, there it is. The very fact that makes him an extreme case puts him out of the whole chapter. Well?"

"Apart from that which, as you hint, gives me a reason to be thankful that I alone (happily for all the rest) possess, surely there is no one in the house who would not say and feel at least as much. You do not think that anybody here would be indifferent to a mischance or misfortune happening to the head of the House, or anything than truly sorry for it?"

"You have good reason to be bound to him too!" said the manager contemptuously. "Why, don't you believe that you are kept here as a cheap example, and a famous instance of the clemency of Dombey and Son, redounding to the credit of the illustrious House?"

"No," replied his brother mildly, "I have long believed that I am kept here for more kind and disinterested reasons."

"But you were going," said the manager, with the snarl of a tiger-cat, "to recite some Christian precept, I observed."

"Nay, James," returned the other, "though the tie of brotherhood between us has been long broken, and thrown away——"

"Who broke it, good sir?" said the manager.

"I, by my misconduct. I do not charge it upon you."

The manager replied, with that mute action of his bristling mouth, "Oh, you don't charge it upon me!" and bade him go on.

"I say, though there is not that tie between us, do not, I entreat, assail me with unnecessary taunts, or misinterpret what I say, or would say. I was only going to suggest to you that it would be a mistake to suppose that it is only you, who have been selected here, above all others, for advancement, confidence, and distinction (selected, in the beginning, I know, for your great ability and trustfulness), and who communicate more freely with Mr. Dombey than any one, and stand, it may be said, on equal terms with him, and have been favoured and enriched by him—that it would be a mistake to suppose that it is only you who are tender of his welfare and reputation. There is no one in the house, from yourself down to the lowest, I sincerely believe, who does not participate in that feeling."

"You lie!" said the manager, red with sud-

den anger. "You're a hypocrite, John Carker, and you lie!"

"James!" cried the other, flushing in his turn. "What do you mean by these insulting words? Why do you so basely use them to me, unprovoked?"

"I tell you," said the manager, "that your hypocrisy and meekness—that all the hypocrisy and meekness of this place—is not worth *that* to me," snapping his thumb and finger, "and that I see through it as if it were air! There is not a man employed here, standing between myself and the lowest in place (of whom you are very considerate, and with reason, for he is not far off), who wouldn't be glad at heart to see his master humbled: who does not hate him secretly: who does not wish him evil rather than good: and who would not turn upon him, if he had the power and boldness. The nearer to his favour, the nearer to his insolence; the closer to him, the farther from him. That's the creed here!"

"I don't know," said his brother, whose roused feelings had soon yielded to surprise, "who may have abused your ear with such representations; or why you have chosen to try me, rather than another. But that you have been trying me, and tampering with me, I am now sure. You have a different manner and a different aspect from any that I ever saw in you. I will only say to you, once more, you are deceived."

"I know I am," said the manager. "I have told you so."

"Not by me," returned his brother. "By your informant, if you have one. If not, by your own thoughts and suspicions."

"I have no suspicions," said the manager. "Mine are certainties. You pusillanimous, abject, cringing dogs! All making the same show, all canting the same story, all whining the same professions, all harbouring the same transparent secret."

His brother withdrew without saying more, and shut the door as he concluded. Mr. Carker the manager drew a chair close before the fire, and fell to beating the coals softly with the poker.

"The faint-hearted, fawning knaves!" he muttered, with his two shining rows of teeth laid bare. "There's not one among them who wouldn't feign to be so shocked and outraged——Bah! There's not one among them but, if he had at once the power, and the wit and daring to use it, would scatter Dombey's pride, and lay it low, as ruthlessly as I rake out these ashes."

As he broke them up, and strewed them in the grate, he looked on with a thoughtful smile at what he was doing. "Without the same queen becomer, too!" he added presently; "and there is a pride there not to be forgotten—witness our own acquaintance!" With that he fell into a deeper reverie, and sat pondering over the blackening grate, until he rose up like a man who had been absorbed in a book, and, looking round him, took his hat and gloves, went to where his horse was waiting, mounted, and rode away through the lighted streets; for it was evening.

He rode near Mr. Dombey's house; and, falling into a walk as he approached it, looked up at the windows. The window where he had once seen Florence sitting with her dog attracted his attention first, though there was no light in it; but he smiled as he carried his eyes up the tall front of the house, and seemed to leave that object superciliously behind.

"Time was," he said, "when it was well to watch even your rising little star, and know in what quarter there were clouds, to shadow you if needful. But a planet has arisen, and you are lost in its light."

He turned the white-legged horse round the street corner, and sought one shining window from among those at the back of the house. Associated with it was a certain stately presence, a gloved hand, the remembrance how the feathers of a beautiful bird's wing had been showered down upon the floor, and how the light white down upon a robe had stirred and rustled, as in the rising of a distant storm. These were the things he carried with him as he turned away again, and rode through the darkening and deserted parks at a quick rate.

In fatal truth, these were associated with a woman, a proud woman, who hated him, but who by slow and sure degrees had been led on by his craft, and her pride and resentment, to endure his company, and little by little to receive him as one who had the privilege to talk to her of her own defiant disregard of her own husband, and her abandonment of high consideration for herself. They were associated with a woman who hated him deeply, and who knew him, and who mistrusted him because she knew him, and because he knew her; but who fed her fierce resentment by suffering him to draw nearer and yet nearer to her every day, in spite of the hate she cherished for him. In spite of it! For that very reason; since its depths, too far down for her threatening eye to pierce, though she could see into them dimly, lay the dark retaliation, whose faintest shadow, seen

once and shuddered at, and never seen again, would have been sufficient stain upon her soul.

Did the phantom of such a woman flit about him on his ride; true to the reality, and obvious to him?

Yes. He saw her in his mind, exactly as she was. She bore him company with her pride, resentment, hatred, all as plain to him as her beauty; with nothing plainer to him than her hatred of him. He saw her sometimes haughty and repellent at his side, and sometimes down among his horse's feet, fallen and in the dust. But he always saw her as she was, without disguise, and watched her on the dangerous way that she was going.

And when his ride was over, and he was newly dressed, and came into the light of her bright room with his bent head, soft voice, and soothing smile, he saw her yet as plainly. He even suspected the mystery of the gloved hand, and held it all the longer in his own for that suspicion. Upon the dangerous way that she was going, he was still; and not a footprint did she mark upon it, but he set his own there straight.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

THE barrier between Mr. Dombey and his wife was not weakened by time. Ill-assorted couple, unhappy in themselves and in each other, bound together by no tie but the manacle that joined their fettered hands, and straining that so harshly, in their shrinking asunder, that it wore and chafed to the bone, Time, consoler of affliction and softener of anger, could do nothing to help them. Their pride, however different in kind and object, was equal in degree; and, in their flinty opposition, struck out fire between them which might smoulder or might blaze, as circumstances were, but burned up everything within their mutual reach, and made their marriage way a road of ashes.

Let us be just to him. In the monstrous delusion of his life, swelling with every grain of sand that shifted in its glass, he urged her on, he little thought to what, or considered how; but still his feeling towards her, such as it was, remained as at first. She had the grand demerit of unaccountably putting herself in opposition to the recognition of his vast importance, and to the acknowledgment of her complete submis-

sion to it, and so far it was necessary to correct and reduce her; but otherwise he still considered her, in his cold way, a lady capable of doing honour, in she would, to his choice and name, and of reflecting credit on his proprietorship.

Now she, with all her might of passionate and proud resentment, bent her dark glance from day to day, and hour to hour—from that night in her own chamber, when she had sat gazing at the shadows on the wall, to the deeper night fast coming—upon one figure directing a crowd of humiliations and exasperations against her; and that figure still her husband's.

Was Mr. Dombey's master-vice, that ruled him, so inexorably, an unnatural characteristic? It might be worth while, sometimes, to inquire what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural. Coop any son or daughter of our mighty mother within narrow range, and bind the prisoner to one idea, and foster it by servile worship of it on the part of the few timid or designing people standing round, and what is Nature to the willing captive who has never risen up upon the wings of a free mind—drooping and useless soon—to see her in her comprehensive truth?

Alas! are there so few things in the world, about us, most unnatural, and yet most natural in being so? Hear the magistrate or judge admonish the unnatural outcasts of society—unnatural in brutal habits, unnatural in want of decency, unnatural in losing and confounding all distinctions between good and evil; unnatural in ignorance, in vice, in recklessness, in contumacy, in mind, in looks, in everything. But follow the good clergyman or doctor, who, with his life imperilled at every breath he draws, goes down into their dens, lying within the echoes of our carriage wheels and daily tread upon the pavement stones. Look round upon the world of odious sights—millions of immortal creatures have no other world on earth—at the lightest mention of which humanity revolts, and dainty delicacy, living in the next street, stops her ears, and lisps, "I don't believe it!" Breathe the polluted air, foul with every impurity that is poisonous to health and life; and have every sense, conferred upon our race for its delight and happiness, offended, sickened, and disgusted, and made a channel by which misery and death alone can enter. Vainly attempt to think of any simple plant, or flower, or wholesome weed that, set in this fetid bed, could have its natural growth, or put its little leaves forth to the sun as God designed it. And then, calling up some ghastly child, with stunted form and wicked face, hold

forth on its unnatural sinfulness, and lament its being, so early, far away from Heaven—but think a little of its having been conceived, and born and bred in Hell!

Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the moral pestilence that rises with them, and, in the eternal laws of outraged Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation! Then should we see depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder, and a long train of nameless sins against the natural affections and repulsions of mankind, overhanging the devoted spots, and creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure. Then should we see how the same poisoned fountains that flow into our hospitals and lazarettos, inundate the gaols, and make the convict ships swim deep, and roll across the seas, and overrun vast continents with crime. Then should we stand appalled to know that where we generate disease to strike our children down, and entail itself on unborn generations, there also we breed, by the same certain process, infamy that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or shame, maturity that is mature in nothing but in suffering and in guilt, blasted old age that is a scandal on the form we bear. Unnatural humanity! When we shall gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles; when fields of grain shall spring up from the offal in the by-ways of our wicked cities, and roses bloom in the fat churchyards that they cherish; then we may look for natural humanity, and find it growing from such seed.

Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off, with a more potent and benignant hand than the lame demon in the tale, and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying Angel as he moves forth among them! For only one night's view of the pale phantoms rising from the scenes of our too-long neglect; and, from the thick and sullen air where Vice and Fever propagate together, raining the tremendous social retributions which are ever pouring down, and ever coming thicker! Bright and blessed the morning that should rise on such a night: for men, delayed no more by stumbling-blocks of their own making, which are but specks of dust upon the path between them and eternity, would then apply themselves, like creatures

of one common origin, owning one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end, to make the world a better place!

Not the less bright and blessed would that day be for rousing some who never have looked out upon the world of human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it, and for making them acquainted with a perversion of Nature in their own contracted sympathies and estimates; as great, and yet as natural in its development when once begun, as the lowest degradation known.

But no such day had ever dawned on Mr. Dombey, or his wife; and the course of each was taken.

Through six months that ensued upon his accident, they held the same relations one towards the other. A marble rock could not have stood more obdurately in his way than she; and no chilled spring, lying uncheered by any ray of light in the depths of a deep cave, could be more sullen or more cold than he.

The hope that had fluttered within her, when the promise of her new home dawned, was quite gone from the heart of Florence now. That home was nearly two years old; and even the patient trust that was in her could not survive the daily blight of such experience. If she had any lingering fancy in the nature of hope left, that Edith and her father might be happier together in some distant time, she had none, now, that her father would ever love her. The little interval in which she had imagined that she saw some small relenting in him was forgotten in the long remembrance of his coldness since and before, or only remembered as a sorrowful delusion.

Florence loved him still, but by degrees had come to love him rather as some dear one who had been, or who might have been, than as the hard reality before her eyes. Something of the softened sadness with which she loved the memory of little Paul, or her mother, seemed to enter now into her thoughts of him, and to make them, as it were, a dear remembrance. Whether it was that he was dead to her, and that partly for this reason, partly for his share in those old objects of her affection, and partly for the long association of him with hopes that were withered and tendernesses he had frozen, she could not have told; but the father whom she loved began to be a vague and dreamy idea to her; hardly more substantially connected with her real life than the image she would sometimes conjure up of her dear brother yet alive, and growing to be a man, who would protect and cherish her.

The change, if it may be called one, had stolen on her like the change from childhood to womanhood, and had come with it. Florence was almost seventeen when, in her lonely musings, she was conscious of these thoughts.

She was often alone now, for the old association between her and her mamma was greatly changed. At the time of her father's accident, and when he was lying in his room down-stairs, Florence had first observed that Edith avoided her. Wounded and shocked, and yet unable to reconcile this with her affection when they did meet, she sought her in her own room at night once more.

"Mamma," said Florence, stealing softly to her side, "have I offended you?"

Edith answered "No."

"I must have done something," said Florence. "Tell me what it is. You have changed your manner to me, dear mamma. I cannot say how instantly I feel the least change; for I love you with my whole heart."

"As I do you," said Edith. "Ah, Florence, believe me, never more than now!"

"Why do you go away from me so often, and keep away?" asked Florence. "And why do you sometimes look so strangely on me, dear mamma? You do so, do you not?"

Edith signified assent with her dark eyes.

"Why?" returned Florence imploringly. "Tell me why, that I may know how to please you better; and tell me this shall not be so any more."

"My Florence," answered Edith, taking the hand that embraced her neck, and looking into the eyes that looked into hers so lovingly, as Florence knelt upon the ground before her; "why it is I cannot tell you. It is neither for me to say, nor you to hear; but that it is, and that it must be, I know. Should I do it if I did not?"

"Are we to be estranged, mamma?" asked Florence, gazing at her like one frightened.

Edith's silent lips formed "Yes."

Florence looked at her with increasing fear and wonder, until she could see her no more through the blinding tears that ran down her face.

"Florence! my life!" said Edith hurriedly, "listen to me. I cannot bear to see this grief. Be calmer. You see that I am composed, and is it nothing to me?"

She resumed her steady voice and manner as she said the latter words, and added presently:

"Not wholly estranged. Partially: and only that in appearance, Florence, for in my own breast I am still the same to you, and ever will be. But what I do is not done for myself."

"Is it for me, mamma?" asked Florence.

"It is enough," said Edith after a pause, "to know what it is: why, matters little. Dear Florence, it is better—it is necessary—it must be—that our association should be less frequent. The confidence there has been between us must be broken off."

"When?" cried Florence. "Oh, mamma, when?"

"Now," said Edith.

"For all time to come?" asked Florence.

"I do not say that," answered Edith. "I do not know that. Nor will I say that companionship between us is, at the best, an ill-assorted and unholy union, of which I might have known no good could come. My way here has been through paths that you will never tread, and my way henceforth may lie—God knows—I do not see it—"

Her voice died away into silence; and she sat, looking at Florence, and almost shrinking from her, with the same strange dread and wild avoidance that Florence had noticed once before. The same dark pride and rage succeeded, sweeping over her form and features like an angry chord across the strings of a wild harp. But no softness or humility ensued on that. She did not lay her head down now, and weep, and say that she had no hope but in Florence. She held it up as if she were a beautiful Medusa, looking on him, face to face, to strike him dead. Yes, and she would have done it, if she had had the charm.

"Mamma," said Florence anxiously, "there is a change in you, in more than what you say to me, which alarms me. Let me stay with you a little."

"No," said Edith, "no, dearest. I am best left alone now, and I do best to keep apart from you, of all else. Ask me no questions, but believe that what I am when I seem fickle or capricious to you, I am not of my own will, or for myself. Believe, though we are stranger to each other than we have been, that I am unchanged to you within. Forgive me for having ever darkened your dark home—I am a shadow on it, I know well—and let us never speak of this again."

"Mamma," sobbed Florence, "we are not to part?"

"We do this that we may not part," said Edith. "Ask no more. Go, Florence! My love and my remorse go with you!"

She embraced her, and dismissed her; and, as Florence passed out of her room, Edith looked on the retiring figure, as if her good angel went out in that form, and left her to the haughty and

indignant passions that now claimed her for their own, and set their seal upon her brow.

From that hour Florence and she were, as they had been, no more. For days together, they would seldom meet, except at table, and when Mr. Dombey was present. Then Edith, imperious, inflexible, and silent, never looked at her. Whenever Mr. Carker was of the party, as he often was during the progress of Mr. Dombey's recovery, and afterwards, Edith held herself more removed from her, and was more distant towards her, than at other times. Yet she and Florence never encountered, when there was no one by, but she would embrace her as affectionately as of old, though not with the same relenting of her proud aspect; and often, when she had been out late, she would steal up to Florence's room, as she had been used to do, in the dark, and whisper "Good night" on her pillow. When unconscious, in her slumber, of such visits, Florence would sometimes awake, as from a dream of those words, softly spoken, and would seem to feel the touch of lips upon her face. But less and less often as the months went on.

And now the void in Florence's own heart began again indeed to make a solitude around her. As the image of the father whom she loved had insensibly become a mere abstraction, so Edith, following the fate of all the rest about whom her affections had entwined themselves, was fleeting, fading, growing paler in the distance, every day. Little by little, she receded from Florence, like the retiring ghost of what she had been; little by little, the chasm between them widened and seemed deeper; little by little, all the power of earnestness and tenderness she had shown was frozen up in the bold, angry hardihood with which she stood upon the brink of a deep precipice unseen by Florence, daring to look down.

There was but one consideration to set against the heavy loss of Edith, and though it was slight comfort to her burdened heart, she tried to think it some relief. No longer divided between her affection and duty to the two, Florence could love both, and do no injustice to either. As shadows of her fond imagination, she could give them equal place in her own bosom, and wrong them with no doubts.

So she tried to do. At times, and often too, wondering speculations on the cause of this change in Edith would obtrude themselves upon her mind and frighten her; but, in the calm of its abandonment once more to silent grief and loneliness, it was not a curious mind. Florence had only to remember that her star of promise was clouded in the general gloom

that hung upon the house, and to weep and be resigned.

Thus living, in a dream wherein the overflowing love of her young heart expended itself on airy forms, and in a real world where she had experienced little but the rolling back of that strong tide upon itself, Florence grew to be seventeen. Timid and retiring as her solitary life had made her, it had not embittered her sweet temper, or her earnest nature. A child in innocent simplicity; a woman in her modest self-reliance, and her deep intensity of feeling; both child and woman seemed at once expressed in her fair face and fragile delicacy of shape, and gracefully to mingle there: as if the spring should be unwilling to depart when summer came, and sought to blend the earlier beauties of the flowers with their bloom. But in her thrilling voice, in her calm eyes, sometimes in a strange ethereal light that seemed to rest upon her head, and always in a certain pensive air upon her beauty, there was an expression such as had been seen in the dead boy; and the council in the Servants' Hall whispered so among themselves, and shook their heads, and ate and drank the more, in a closer bond of good-fellowship.

This observant body had plenty to say of Mr. and Mrs. Dombey, and of Mr. Carker, who appeared to be a mediator between them, and who came and went as if he were trying to make peace, but never could. They all deplored the uncomfortable state of affairs, and all agreed that Mrs. Pipchin (whose unpopularity was not to be surpassed) had some hand in it; but, upon the whole, it was agreeable to have so good a subject for a rallying-point, and they made a great deal of it, and enjoyed themselves very much.

The general visitors who came to the house, and those among whom Mr. and Mrs. Dombey visited, thought it a pretty equal match as to haughtiness, at all events, and thought nothing more about it. The young lady with the back did not appear for some time after Mrs. Skewton's death; observing to some particular friends, with her usual engaging little scream, that she couldn't separate the family from a notion of tombstones, and horrors of that sort; but, when she did come, she saw nothing wrong, except Mr. Dombey's wearing a bunch of gold seals to his watch, which shocked her very much, as an exploded superstition. This youthful fascinator considered a daughter-in-law objectionable in principle; otherwise, she had nothing to say against Florence, but that she sadly wanted "style"—which might mean back, perhaps. Many, who only came to the house on state

occasions, hardly knew who Florence was, and said, going home, "Indeed I was *that* Miss Dombey in the corner? Very pretty, but a little delicate and thoughtful in appearance!"

None the less so, certainly, for her life of the last six months, Florence took her seat at the dinner-table, on the day before the second anniversary of her father's marriage to Edith (Mrs. Skewton had been lying stricken with paralysis when the first came round), with an uneasiness amounting to dread. She had no other warrant for it than the occasion, the expression of her father's face, in the hasty glance she caught of it, and the presence of Mr. Carker, which, always unpleasant to her, was more so on this day than she had ever felt it before.

Edith was richly dressed, for she and Mr. Dombey were engaged in the evening to some large assembly, and the dinner hour that day was late. She did not appear until they were seated at table, when Mr. Carker rose and led her to her chair. Beautiful and lustrous as she was, there was that in her face and air which seemed to separate her hopelessly from Florence, and from every one, for evermore. And yet, for an instant, Florence saw a beam of kindness in her eyes, when they were turned on her, that made the distance to which she had withdrawn herself a greater cause of sorrow and regret than ever.

There was very little said at dinner. Florence heard her father speak to Mr. Carker sometimes on business matters, and heard him softly reply, but she paid little attention to what they said, and only wished the dinner at an end. When the dessert was placed upon the table, and they were left alone, with no servant in attendance, Mr. Dombey, who had been several times clearing his throat in a manner that augured no good, said:

"Mrs. Dombey, you know, I suppose, that I have instructed the housekeeper that there will be some company to dinner here to-morrow?"

"I do not dine at home," she answered.

"Not a large party," pursued Mr. Dombey, with an indifferent assumption of not having heard her; "merely some twelve or fourteen. My sister, Major Bagstock, and some others whom you know but slightly."

"I do not dine at home," she repeated.

"However doubtful reason I may have, Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, still going majestically on, as if she had not spoken, "to hold the occasion in very pleasant remembrance just now, there are appearances in these things which must be maintained before the world. If you have no respect for yourself, Mrs. Dombey——"

"I have none," she said.

"Madam," cried Mr. Dombey, striking his hand upon the table, "hear me, if you please. I say, if you have no respect for yourself——"

"And I say I have none," she answered.

He looked at her; but the face she showed him in return would not have changed, if death itself had looked.

"Carker," said Mr. Dombey, turning more quietly to that gentleman, "as you have been my medium of communication with Mrs. Dombey on former occasions, and as I choose to preserve the decencies of life, so far as I am individually concerned, I will trouble you to have the goodness to inform Mrs. Dombey that if she has no respect for herself, I have some respect for *myself*, and therefore insist on my arrangements for to-morrow."

"Tell your sovereign master, sir," said Edith, "that I will take leave to speak to him on this subject by-and-by, and that I will speak to him alone."

"Mr. Carker, madam," said her husband, "being in possession of the reason which obliges me to refuse you that privilege, shall be absolved from the delivery of any such message." He saw her eyes move while he spoke, and followed them with his own.

"Your daughter is present, sir," said Edith.

"My daughter will remain present," said Mr. Dombey.

Florence, who had risen, sat down again, hiding her face in her hands, and trembling.

"My daughter, madam——" began Mr. Dombey.

But Edith stopped him, in a voice which, although not raised in the least, was so clear, emphatic, and distinct, that it might have been heard in a whirlwind.

"I tell you I will speak to you alone," she said. "If you are not mad, heed what I say."

"I have authority to speak to you, madam," returned her husband, "when and where I please; and it is my pleasure to speak here and now."

She rose up as if to leave the room; but sat down again, and looking at him with all outward composure, said, in the same voice:

"You shall!"

"I must tell you, first, that there is a threatening appearance in your manner, madam," said Mr. Dombey, "which does not become you."

She laughed. The shaken diamonds in her hair started and trembled. There are fables of precious stones that would turn pale, their wearers being in danger. Had these been such, their imprisoned rays of light would have taken flight

that moment, and they would have been as dull as lead.

Carker listened, with his eyes cast down.

"As to my daughter, madam," said Mr. Dombey, resuming the thread of his discourse, "it is by no means inconsistent with her duty to me that she should know what conduct to avoid. At present you are a very strong example to her of this kind, and I hope she may profit by it."

"I would not stop you now," returned his wife, immovable in eye, and voice, and attitude; "I would not rise and go away, and save you the utterance of one word, if the room were burning."

Mr. Dombey moved his head, as if in a sarcastic acknowledgment of the attention, and resumed. But not with so much self-possession as before; for Edith's quick uneasiness in reference to Florence, and Edith's indifference to him and his censure, chafed and galled him like a stiffening wound.

"Mrs. Dombey," said he, "it may not be inconsistent with my daughter's improvement to know how very much to be lamented, and how necessary to be corrected, a stubborn disposition is, especially when it is indulged in—unthankfully indulged in, I will add—after the gratification of ambition and interest. Both of which, I believe, had some share in inducing you to occupy your present station at this board."

"No! I would not rise and go away, and save you the utterance of one word," she repeated, exactly as before, "if the room were burning."

"It may be natural enough, Mrs. Dombey," he pursued, "that you should be uneasy in the presence of any auditors of these disagreeable truths; though why"—he could not hide his real feelings here, or keep his eyes from glancing gloomily at Florence—"why any one can give them greater force and point than myself, whom they so nearly concern, I do not pretend to understand. It may be natural enough that you should object to hear, in anybody's presence, that there is a rebellious principle within you which you cannot curb too soon; which you must curb, Mrs. Dombey; and which, I regret to say, I remember to have seen manifested—with some doubt and displeasure, on more than one occasion before our marriage—towards your deceased mother. But you have the remedy in your own hands. I by no means forgot, when I began, that my daughter was present, Mrs. Dombey. I beg: you will not forget, to-morrow, that there are several persons present; and that, with some regard to appear-

ances, you will receive your company in a becoming manner."

"So it is not enough," said Edith, "that you know what has passed between yourself and me; it is not enough that you can look here," pointing at Carker, who still listened, with his eyes cast down, "and be reminded of the affronts you have put upon me; it is not enough that you can look here," pointing to Florence with a hand that slightly trembled for the first and only time, "and think of what you have done, and of the ingenious agony, daily, hourly, constant, you have made me feel in doing it; it is not enough that this day, of all others in the year, is memorable to me for a struggle (well deserved, but not conceivable by such as you) in which I wish I had died! You add to all this, do you, the last crowning meanness of making *her* a witness of the depth to which I have fallen; when you know that you have made me sacrifice to her peace the only gentle feeling and interest of my life; when you know that, for her sake, I would now, if I could—but I *can not*, my soul recoils from you too much—submit myself wholly to your will, and be the meekest vassal that you have!"

"This was not the way to minister to Mr. Dombey's greatness. The old feeling was roused, by what she said, into a stronger and fiercer existence than it had ever had. Again his neglected child, at this rough passage of his life, put forth, by even this rebellious woman, as powerful where he was powerless, and everything where he was nothing!

He turned on Florence, as if it were she who had spoken, and bade her leave the room. Florence, with her covered face obeyed, trembling and weeping as she went.

"I understand, madam," said Mr. Dombey with an angry flush of triumph, "the spirit of opposition that turned your affections in that channel, but they have been met, Mrs. Dombey; they have been met, and turned back!"

"The worse for you!" she answered, with her voice and manner still unchanged. "Ay!"—for he turned sharply when she said so—"what is the worse for me is twenty million times the worse for you. Heed that, if you heed nothing else."

The arch of diamonds spanning her dark hair flashed and glittered like a starry bridge. There was no warning in them, or they would have turned as dull and dim as tarnished honour. Carker still sat and listened, with his eyes cast down.

"Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, resuming as much as he could of his arrogant composure,

"you will not conciliate me, or turn me from any purpose, by this course of conduct."

"It is the only true although it is a faint expression of what is within me," she replied. "But if I thought it would conciliate you, I would repress it, if it were repressible by any human effort. I will do nothing that you ask."

"I am not accustomed to ask, Mrs. Dombey," he observed; "I direct."

"I will hold no place in your house to-morrow, or on any recurrence of to-morrow. I will be exhibited to no one as the refractory slave you purchased such a time. If I kept my marriage-day, I would keep it as a day of shame. Self-respect! appearances before the world! what are these to me? You have done all you can to make them nothing to me, and they *are* nothing."

"Carker," said Mr. Dombey, speaking with knitted brows, and after a moment's consideration, "Mrs. Dombey is so forgetful of herself and me in all this, and places me in a position so unsuited to my character, that I must bring this state of matters to a close."

"Release me, then," said Edith, immovable in voice, in look, and bearing, as she had been throughout, "from the chain by which I am bound. Let me go."

"Madam!" exclaimed Mr. Dombey.

"Loose me! Set me free!"

"Madam!" he repeated. "Mrs. Dombey!"

"Tell him," said Edith, addressing her proud face to Carker, "that I wish for a separation between us. That there had better be one. That I recommend it to him. Tell him it may take place on his own terms—his wealth is nothing to me—but that it cannot be too soon."

"Good Heaven, Mrs. Dombey!" said her husband with supreme amazement, "do you imagine it possible that I could ever listen to such a proposition? Do you know who I am, madam? Do you know what I represent? Did you ever hear of Dombey and Son? People to say that Mr. Dombey—Mr. Dombey!—was separated from his wife! Common people to talk of Mr. Dombey and his domestic affairs? Do you seriously think, Mrs. Dombey, that I would permit my name to be handed about in such connection? Pooh, pooh, madam! Fie for shame! You're absurd." Mr. Dombey absolutely laughed.

But not as she did. She had better have been dead than laugh as she did, in reply, with her intent look fixed upon him. He had better have been dead than sitting there, in his magnificence, to hear her.

"No, Mrs. Dombey," he resumed, "no,

madam. There is no possibility of separation between you and me, and therefore I the more advise you to be awakened to a sense of duty. And, Carker, as I was about to say to you——"

Mr. Carker, who had sat and listened all this

time, now raised his eyes, in which there was a bright, unusual light.

"—As I was about to say to you," resumed Mr. Dombey, "I must beg you, now that matters have come to this, to inform Mrs. Dombey that it is not the rule of my life to



"FLUNG IT DOWN, AND TROD UPON THE GLITTERING HEAP."

allow myself to be thwarted by anybody—anybody, Carker—or to suffer anybody to be paraded as a stronger motive for obedience in those who owe obedience to me than I am myself. The mention that has been made of my daughter, and the use that is made of my

daughter, in opposition to me, are unnatural. Whether my daughter is in actual concert with Mrs. Dombey, I do not know, and do not care; but after what Mrs. Dombey has said to-day, and my daughter has heard to-day, I beg you to make known to Mrs. Dombey that if she con-

tinues to make this house the scene of contention it has become, I shall consider my daughter responsible in some degree, on that lady's own avowal, and shall visit her with my severe displeasure. Mrs. Dombey has asked, whether it is not enough that she had done this and that. You will please to answer, No, it is not enough."

"A moment!" cried Carker, interposing, "permit me! Painful as my position is at the best, and unusually painful in seeming to entertain a different opinion from you," addressing Mr. Dombey, "I must ask, had you not better reconsider the question of a separation? I know how incompatible it appears with your high public position, and I know how determined you are when you give Mrs. Dombey to understand"—the light in his eyes fell upon her as he separated his words each from each, with the distinctness of so many bells—"that nothing but death can ever part you. Nothing else. But when you consider that Mrs. Dombey, by living in this house, and making it, as you have said, a scene of contention, not only has her part in that contention, but compromises Miss Dombey every day (for I know how determined you are), will you not relieve her from a continual irritation of spirit, and a continual sense of being unjust to another, almost intolerable? Does this not seem like—I do not say it is—sacrificing Mrs. Dombey to the preservation of your pre-eminent and unassailable position?"

Again the light in his eyes fell upon her, as she stood looking at her husband: now with an extraordinary and awful smile upon her face.

"Carker," returned Mr. Dombey with a supercilious frown, and in a tone that was intended to be final, "you mistake your position in offering advice to me on such a point, and you mistake me (I am surprised to find) in the character of your advice. I have no more to say."

"Perhaps," said Carker with an unusual and indefinable taunt in his air, "you mistook my position when you honoured me with the negotiations in which I have been engaged here"—with a motion of his hand towards Mrs. Dombey.

"Not at all, sir, not at all," returned the other haughtily. "You were employed—"

"Being an inferior person, for the humiliation of Mrs. Dombey. I forgot. Oh yes, it was expressly understood!" said Carker. "I beg your pardon!"

As he bent his head to Mr. Dombey with an air of deference that accorded ill with his words, though they were humbly spoken, he moved it round towards her, and kept his watching eyes that way.

She had better have turned hideous, and dropped dead, than have stood up with such a smile upon her face, in such a fallen spirit's majesty of scorn and beauty. She lifted her hand to the tiara of bright jewels radiant on her head, and, plucking it off with a force that dragged and strained her rich black hair with heedless cruelty, and brought it tumbling wildly on her shoulders, cast the gems upon the ground. From each arm she unclasped a diamond bracelet, flung it down, and trod upon the glittering heap. Without a word, without a shadow on the fire of her bright eye, without abatement of her awful smile, she looked on Mr. Dombey to the last, in moving to the door; and left him.

Florence had heard enough, before quitting the room, to know that Edith loved her yet; that she had suffered for her sake; and that she had kept her sacrifices quiet, lest they should trouble her peace. She did not want to speak to her of this—she could not, remembering to whom she was opposed—but she wished, in one silent and affectionate embrace, to assure her that she felt it all, and thanked her.

Her father went out alone that evening, and Florence, issuing from her own chamber soon afterwards, went about the house in search of Edith, but unavailingly. She was in her own rooms, where Florence had long ceased to go, and did not dare to venture now, lest she should unconsciously engender new trouble. Still Florence, hoping to meet her before going to bed, changed from room to room, and wandered through the house, so splendid and so dreary, without remaining anywhere.

She was crossing a gallery of communication that opened at some little distance on the staircase, and was only lighted on great occasions, when she saw, through the opening, which was an arch, the figure of a man coming down some few stairs opposite. Instinctively apprehensive of her father, whom she supposed it was, she stopped in the dark, gazing through the arch into the light. But it was Mr. Carker coming down alone, and looking over the railing into the hall. No bell was rung to announce his departure, and no servant was in attendance. He went down quietly, opened the door for himself, glided out, and shut it softly after him.

Her invincible repugnance to this man, and perhaps the stealthy act of watching any one, which, even under such innocent circumstances, is in a manner guilty and oppressive, made Florence shake from head to foot. Her blood seemed to run cold. As soon as she could—for at first she felt an insurmountable dread of moving

—she went quickly to her own room and locked her door; but even then, shut in with her dog beside her, felt a chill sensation of horror, as if there were danger brooding somewhere near her.

It invaded her dreams and disturbed the whole night. Rising in the morning unrefreshed, and with a heavy recollection of the domestic unhappiness of the preceding day, she sought Edith again in all the rooms, and did so, from time to time, all the morning. But she remained in her own chamber, and Florence saw nothing of her. Learning, however, that the projected dinner at home was put off, Florence thought it likely that she would go out in the evening to fulfil the engagement she had spoken of: and resolved to try and meet her then, upon the staircase.

When the evening had set in, she heard, from the room in which she sat on purpose, a foot-step on the stairs that she thought to be Edith's. Hurrying out, and up towards her room, Florence met her immediately, coming down alone.

What was Florence's affright and wonder when, at sight of her, with her tearful face and outstretched arms, Edith recoiled and shrieked!

"Don't come near me!" she cried. "Keep away! Let me go by!"

"Mamma!" said Florence.

"Don't call me by that name! Don't speak to me! Don't look at me!—Florence!" shrinking back as Florence moved a step towards her, "don't touch me!"

As Florence stood transfixed before the haggard face and staring eyes, she noted, as in a dream, that Edith spread her hands over them, and shuddering through all her form, and crouching down against the wall, crawled by her like some lower animal, sprang up, and fled away.

Florence dropped upon the stairs in a swoon; and was found there by Mrs. Pipchin, she supposed. She knew nothing more until she found herself lying on her own bed, with Mrs. Pipchin and some servants standing round her.

"Where is mamma?" was her first question.

"Gone out to dinner," said Mrs. Pipchin.

"And papa?"

"Mr. Dombey's in his own room, Miss Dombey," said Mrs. Pipchin, "and the best thing you can do is to take off your things and go to bed this minute." This was the sagacious woman's remedy for all complaints, particularly lowness of spirits, and inability to sleep; for which offences many young victims in the days of the Brighton Castle had been committed to bed at ten o'clock in the morning.

Without promising obedience, but on the plea of desiring to be very quiet, Florence disengaged herself, as soon as she could, from the ministrations of Mrs. Pipchin and her attendants. Left alone, she thought of what had happened on the staircase, at first in doubt of its reality; then with tears; then with an indescribable and terrible alarm, like that she had felt the night before.

She determined not to go to bed until Edith returned, and, if she could not speak to her, at least to be sure that she was safe at home. What indistinct and shadowy dread-moved Florence to this resolution she did not know, and did not dare to think. She only knew that, until Edith came back, there was no repose for her aching head or throbbing heart.

The evening deepened into night; midnight came; no Edith.

Florence could not read, or rest a moment. She paced her own room, opened the door and paced the staircase gallery outside, looked out of the window on the night, listened to the wind blowing and the rain falling, sat down and watched the faces in the fire, got up and watched the moon flying like a storm-driven ship through the sea of clouds.

All the house was gone to bed, except two servants who were waiting the return of their mistress down-stairs.

One o'clock. The carriages that rumbled in the distance turned away, or stopped short, or went past; the silence gradually deepened, and was more and more rarely broken, save by a rush of wind or sweep of rain. Two o'clock. No Edith.

Florence, more agitated, paced her room; and paced the gallery outside; and looked out at the night, blurred and wavy with the rain-drops on the glass, and the tears in her own eyes; and looked up at the hurry in the sky, so different from the repose below, and yet so tranquil and solitary. Three o'clock! There was a terror in every ash that dropped out of the fire. No Edith yet.

More and more agitated, Florence paced her room, and paced the gallery, and looked out at the moon with a new fancy of her likeness to a pale fugitive hurrying away and hiding her guilty face. Four struck! Five! No Edith yet.

But now there was some cautious stir in the house; and Florence found that Mrs. Pipchin had been awakened by one of those who sat up, had risen, and had gone down to her father's door. Stealing lower down the stairs, and observing what passed, she saw her father come out in his morning gown, and start when he was

told his wife had not come home. He dispatched a messenger to the stables to inquire whether the coachman was there; and, while the man was gone, dressed himself very hurriedly.

The man came back in great haste, bringing the coachman with him, who said he had been at home and in bed since ten o'clock. He had driven his mistress to her old house in Brook Street, where she had been met by Mr. Carker—

Florence stood upon the very spot where she had seen him coming down. Again she shivered with the nameless terror of that sight, and had hardly steadiness enough to hear and understand what followed.

—Who had told him, the man went on to say, that his mistress would not want the carriage to go home in; and had dismissed him.

She saw her father turn white in the face, and heard him ask, in a quick, trembling voice, for Mrs. Dombey's maid. The whole house was roused; for she was there in a moment, very pale too, and speaking incoherently.

She said she had dressed her mistress early—full two hours before she went out—and had been told, as she often was, that she would not be wanted at night. She had just come from her mistress's rooms, but—

"But what? What was it?" Florence heard her father demand like a madman.

"—But the inner dressing-room was locked, and the key gone."

Her father seized a candle that was flaming on the ground—some one had put it down there, and forgotten it—and came running upstairs with such fury, that Florence, in her fear, had hardly time to fly before him. She heard him striking in the door as she ran on, with her hands wildly spread, and her hair streaming, and her face like a distracted person's, back to her own room.

When the door yielded, and he rushed in, what did he see there? No one knew. But thrown down in a costly mass upon the ground was every ornament she had had since she had been his wife; every dress she had worn; and everything she had possessed. This was the room in which he had seen, in yonder mirror, the proud face discard him. This was the room in which he had wondered, idly, how these things would look when he should see them next!

Heaping them back into the drawers, and locking them up in a rage of haste, he saw some papers on the table. The deed of settlement he had executed on their marriage, and a letter. He read that she was gone. He read that he

was dishonoured. He read that she had fled, upon her shameful wedding-day, with the man whom he had chosen for her humiliation; and he tore out of the room, and out of the house, with a frantic idea of finding her yet, at the place to which she had been taken, and beating all trace of beauty out of the triumphant face with his bare hand.

Florence, not knowing what she did, put on a shawl and bonnet, in a dream of running through the streets until she found Edith, and then, clasping her in her arms, to save and bring her back. But when she hurried out upon the staircase, and saw the frightened servants going up and down with lights, and whispering together, and falling away from her father as he passed down, she awoke to a sense of her own powerlessness; and hiding in one of the great rooms that had been made gorgeous for *this*, felt as if her heart would burst with grief.

Compassion for her father was the first distinct emotion that made head against the flood of sorrow which overwhelmed her. Her constant nature turned to him, in his distress, as fervently and faithfully as if, in his prosperity, he had been the embodiment of that idea which had gradually become so faint and dim. Although she did not know, otherwise than through the suggestions of a shapeless fear, the full extent of his calamity, he stood before her wronged and deserted; and again her yearning love impelled her to his side.

He was not long away: for Florence was yet weeping in the great room, and nourishing these thoughts, when she heard him come back. He ordered the servants to set about their ordinary occupations, and went into his own apartment, where he trod so heavily, that she could hear him walking up and down from end to end.

Yielding, at once, to the impulse of her affection, timid at all other times, but bold in its truth to him in his adversity, and undaunted by past repulse, Florence, dressed as she was, hurried down-stairs. As she set her light foot in the hall, he came out of his room. She hastened towards him unchecked, with her arms stretched out, and crying, "Oh, dear, dear papa!" as if she would have clasped him round the neck.

And so she would have done. But, in his frenzy, he lifted up his cruel arm, and struck her, crosswise, with that heaviness, that she tottered on the marble floor; and, as he dealt the blow, he told her what Edith was, and bade her follow her, since they had always been in league.

She did not sink down at his feet; she did not shut out the sight of him with her trembling hands; she did not weep; she did not utter one word of reproach. But she looked at him, and a cry of desolation issued from her heart. For, as she looked, she saw him murdering that fond

idea to which she had held in spite of him. She saw his cruelty, neglect, and hatred dominant above it, and stamping it down. She saw she had no father upon earth, and ran out, orphaned, from his house.

Ran out of his house: A moment, and her



"THROWN DOWN IN A COSTLY MASS UPON THE GROUND WAS EVERY ORNAMENT SHE HAD HAD SINCE SHE HAD BEEN HIS WIFE; EVERY DRESS SHE HAD WORN; AND EVERYTHING SHE HAD POSSESSED."

hand was on the lock, the cry was on her lips, his face was there, made paler by the yellow candles hastily put down and guttering away, and by the daylight coming in above the door. Another moment, and the close darkness of the

shut-up house (forgotten to be opened, though it was long since day) yielded to the unexpected glare and freedom of the morning; and Florence, with her head bent down to hide her agony of tears, was in the streets,

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE FLIGHT OF FLORENCE.

IN the wildness of her sorrow, shame, and terror, the forlorn girl hurried through the sunshine of a bright morning as if it were the darkness of a winter night. Wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, insensible to everything but the deep wound in her breast, stunned by the loss of all she loved, left like the sole survivor on a lonely shore from the wreck of a great vessel, she fled without a thought, without a hope, without a purpose, but to fly somewhere—anywhere.

The cheerful vista of the long street, burnished by the morning light, the sight of the blue sky and airy clouds, the vigorous freshness of the day, so flushed and rosy in its conquest of the night, awakened no responsive feelings in her so hurt bosom. Somewhere, anywhere, to hide her head! Somewhere, anywhere, for refuge, never more to look upon the place from which she fled!

But there were people going to and fro; there were opening shops, and servants at the doors of houses; there was the rising clash and roar of the day's struggle. Florence saw surprise and curiosity in the faces flitting past her; saw long shadows coming back upon the pavement; and heard voices that were strange to her asking her where she went, and what the matter was; and though these frightened her the more at first, and made her hurry on the faster, they did her the good service of recalling her in some degree to herself, and reminding her of the necessity of greater composure.

Where to go? Still somewhere, anywhere! still going on; but where? She thought of the only other time she had been lost in the wide wilderness of London—though not lost as now—and went that way. To the home of Walter's uncle.

Checking her sobs, and drying her swollen eyes, and endeavouring to calm the agitation of her manner, so as to avoid attracting notice, Florence, resolving to keep to the more quiet streets as long as she could, was going on more quietly herself, when a familiar little shadow darted past upon the sunny pavement, stopped short, wheeled about, came close to her, made off again, bounded round and round her, and Diogenes, panting for breath, and yet making the street ring with his glad bark, was at her feet.

"Oh, Di! oh, dear, true, faithful Di, how did

you come here? How could I ever leave you, Di, who would never leave me!"

Florence bent down on the pavement, and laid his rough, old, loving, foolish head against her breast, and they got up together, and went on together; Di, more off the ground than on it, endeavouring to kiss his mistress flying, tumbling over and getting up again without the least concern, dashing at big dogs in a jocose defiance of his species, terrifying with touches of his nose young housemaids who were cleaning door-steps, and continually stopping, in the midst of a thousand extravagances, to look back at Florence, and bark until all the dogs within hearing answered, and all the dogs who could come out came out to stare at him.

With this last adherent, Florence hurried away, in the advancing morning and the strengthening sunshine, to the City. The roar soon grew more loud, the passengers more numerous, the shops more busy, until she was carried onward in a stream of life setting that way, and flowing indifferently past marts and mansions, prisons, churches, market-places, wealth, poverty, good and evil, like the broad river, side by side with it, awakened from its dreams of rushes, willows, and green moss, and rolling on, turbid and troubled, among the works and cares of men, to the deep sea.

At length the quarters of the little Midshipman arose in view. Nearer yet, and the little Midshipman himself was seen upon his post, intent as ever on his observations. Nearer yet, and the door stood open, inviting her to enter. Florence, who had again quickened her pace, as she approached the end of her journey, ran across the road (closely followed by Diogenes, whom the bustle had somewhat confused), ran in, and sank upon the threshold of the well-remembered little parlour.

The captain, in his glazed hat, was standing over the fire, making his morning's cocoa, with that elegant trifle, his watch, upon the chimney-piece, for easy reference during the progress of the cookery. Hearing a footstep and the rustle of a dress, the captain turned with a palpitating remembrance of the dreadful Mrs. MacSinger, at the instant when Florence made a motion with her hand towards him, reeled, and fell upon the floor.

The captain, pale as Florence, pale in the very knobs upon his face, raised her like a baby, and laid her on the same old sofa upon which she had slumbered long ago.

"It's Heart's Delight!" said the captain, looking intently in her face. "It's the sweet creature grew a woman!"

Captain Cuttle was so respectful of her, and had such a reverence for her, in this new character, that he would not have held her in his arms, while she was unconscious, for a thousand pounds.

"My Heart's Delight!" said the captain, withdrawing to a little distance, with the greatest alarm and sympathy depicted on his countenance. "If you can hail Ned Cuttle with a finger, do it!"

But Florence did not stir.

"My Heart's Delight!" said the trembling captain. "For the sake of Wal'r, drowned in the briny deep, turn to and h'iste up something or another, if able!"

Finding her insensible to this impressive adjuration also, Captain Cuttle snatched from his breakfast-table a basin of cold water, and sprinkled some upon her face. Yielding to the urgency of the case, the captain then, using his immense hand with extraordinary gentleness, relieved her of her bonnet, moistened her lips and forehead, put back her hair, covered her feet with his own coat, which he pulled off for the purpose, patted her hand—so small in his, that he was struck with wonder when he touched it—and seeing that her eyelids quivered, and that her lips began to move, continued these restorative applications with a better heart.

"Cheerily!" said the captain. "Cheerily! Stand by, my pretty one, stand by! There! You're better now. Steady's the word, and steady it is. Keep her so! Drink a little drop o' this here," said the captain. "There you are! What cheer now, my pretty, what cheer now?"

At this stage of her recovery, Captain Cuttle, with an imperfect association of a Watch with a Physician's treatment of a patient, took his own down from the mantel-shelf, and holding it out on his hook, and taking Florence's hand in his, looked steadily from one to the other, as expecting the dial to do something.

"What cheer, my pretty?" said the captain. "What cheer now? You've done her some good, my lad, I believe," said the captain under his breath, and throwing an approving glance upon his watch. "Put you back half an hour every morning, and about another quarter towards the afternoon, and you're a watch as can be ekal'd by few, and excelled by none. What cheer, my lady lass?"

"Captain Cuttle! Is it you?" exclaimed Florence, raising herself a little.

"Yes, yes, my lady lass," said the captain, hastily deciding in his own mind upon the superior elegance of that form of address, as the most courtly he could think of.

"Is Walter's uncle here?" asked Florence.

"Here, pretty!" returned the captain. "He an't been here this many a long day. He an't been heerd on since he sheered off arter poof Wal'r. But," said the captain as a quotation, "though lost to sight, to memory dear, and England, Home, and Beauty!"

"Do you live here?" asked Florence.

"Yes, my lady lass," returned the captain.

"Oh, Captain Cuttle!" cried Florence, putting her hands together, and speaking wildly. "Save me! keep me here! Let no one know where I am! I'll tell you what has happened by-and-by, when I can. I have no one in the world to go to. Do not send me away!"

"Send you away, my lady lass!" exclaimed the captain. "You, my Heart's Delight! Stay a bit! We'll put up this here dead-light, and take a double turn on the key!"

With these words, the captain, using his one hand and his hook with the greatest dexterity, got out the shutter of the door, put it up, made it all fast, and locked the door itself.

When he came back to the side of Florence, she took his hand and kissed it. The helplessness of the action, the appeal it made to him, the confidence it expressed, the unspeakable sorrow in her face, the pain of mind she had too plainly suffered, and was suffering then, his knowledge of her past history, her present lonely, worn, and unprotected appearance, all so rushed upon the good captain together, that he fairly overflowed with compassion and gentleness.

"My lady lass," said the captain, polishing the bridge of his nose with his arm until it shone like burnished copper, "don't you say a word to Ed'ard Cuttle until such times as you finds yourself a riding smooth and easy; which won't be to-day, nor yet to-morrow. And as to giving of you up, or reporting where you are, yes, verily, and by God's help, so I won't, Church catechism, make a note on!"

This the captain said, reference and all, in one breath, and with much solemnity; taking off his hat at "yes, verily," and putting it on again when he had quite concluded.

Florence could do but one thing more to thank him, and to show him how she trusted in him; and she did it. Clinging to this rough creature as the last asylum of her bleeding heart, she laid her head upon his honest shoulder and clasped him round his neck, and would have kneeled down to bless him, but that he divined her purpose, and held her up like a true man.

"Steady!" said the captain. "Steady!"

You're too weak to stand, you see, my pretty, and must lie down here again. There, there!" To see the captain lift her on the sofa, and cover her with his coat, would have been worth a hundred state sights. "And now," said the captain, "you must take some breakfast, lady lass, and the dog shall have some too. And arter that you shall go aloft to old Sol Gills's room, and fall asleep there like a angel."

Captain Cuttle patted Diogenes when he made allusion to him, and Diogenes met that overture graciously, half-way. During the administration of the restoratives he had clearly been in two minds whether to fly at the captain or to offer him his friendship; and he had expressed that conflict of feeling by alternate waggings of his tail, and displays of his teeth, with now and then a growl or so. But by this time his doubts were all removed. It was plain that he considered the captain one of the most amiable men, and a man whom it was an honour to a dog to know.

In evidence of these convictions, Diogenes attended on the captain while he made some tea and toast, and showed a lively interest in his housekeeping. But it was in vain for the kind captain to make such preparations for Florence, who sorely tried to do some honour to them, but could touch nothing, and could only weep and weep again.

"Well, well!" said the compassionate captain, "arter turning in, my Heart's Delight, you'll get more way upon you. Now, I'll serve out your allowance, my lad." To Diogenes. "And you shall keep guard on your mistress aloft."

Diogenes, however, although he had been eyeing his intended breakfast with a watering mouth and glistening eyes, instead of falling to ravenously when it was put before him, pricked up his ears, darted to the shop-door, and barked there furiously: burrowing with his head at the bottom, as if he were bent on mining his way out.

"Can there be anybody there?" asked Florence in alarm.

"No, my lady lass," returned the captain. "Who'd stay there without making any noise? Keep up a good heart, pretty. It's only people going by."

But, for all that, Diogenes barked and barked, and burrowed and burrowed, with pertinacious fury; and, whenever he stopped to listen, appeared to receive some new conviction into his mind, for he set to barking and burrowing again a dozen times. Even when he was persuaded to return to his breakfast, he came jogging back

to it with a very doubtful air; and was off again, in another paroxysm, before touching a morsel.

"If there should be some one listening and watching," whispered Florence. "Some one who saw me come—who followed me, perhaps."

"It an't the young woman, lady lass, is it?" said the captain, taken with a bright idea.

"Susan?" said Florence, shaking her head.

"Ah, no! Susan has been gone from me a long time."

"Not deserted, I hope?" said the captain. "Don't say that there young woman's run, my pretty!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Florence. "She is one of the truest hearts in the world!"

The captain was greatly relieved by this reply, and expressed his satisfaction by taking off his hard, glazed hat, and dabbing his head all over with his handkerchief rolled up like a ball, observing several times, with infinite complacency, and with a beaming countenance, that he knewed it.

"So you're quiet now, are you, brother?" said the captain to Diogenes. "There warn't nobody there, my lady lass, bless you!"

Diogenes was not so sure of that. The door still had an attraction for him at intervals; and he went snuffing about it, and growling to himself, unable to forget the subject. This incident, coupled with the captain's observation of Florence's fatigue and faintness, decided him to prepare Sol Gills's chamber as a place of retirement for her immediately. He therefore hastily betook himself to the top of the house, and made the best arrangement of it that his imagination and his means suggested.

It was very clean already; and the captain, being an orderly man, and accustomed to make things ship-shape, converted the bed into a couch, by covering it all over with a clean white drapery. By a similar contrivance, the captain converted the little dressing-table into a species of altar, on which he set forth two silver tea-spoons, a flower-pot, a telescope, his celebrated watch, a pocket comb, and a song-book, as a small collection of rarities that made a choice appearance. Having darkened the window, and straightened the pieces of carpet on the floor, the captain surveyed these preparations with great delight, and descended to the little parlour again, to bring Florence to her bower.

Nothing would induce the captain to believe that it was possible for Florence to walk upstairs. If he could have got the idea into his head, he would have considered it an outrageous breach of hospitality to allow her to do so,

Florence was too weak to dispute the point, and the captain carried her up out of hand, laid her down, and covered her with a great watch-coat.

"My lady lass!" said the captain, "you're as safe here as if you was at the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, with the ladder cast off. Sleep is what you want, afore all other things, and may you be able to show yourself smart with that there balsam for the still small voice of a wounded mind! When there's anything you want, my Heart's Delight, as this here humble

house or town can offer, pass the word to Ed'ard Cuttle, as'll stand off and on outside that door, and that there man will vibrate with joy." The captain concluded by kissing the hand that Florence stretched out to him, with the chivalry of any old knight-errant, and walking on tiptoe out of the room.

Descending to the little parlour, Captain Cuttle, after holding a hasty council with himself, decided to open the shop-door for a few minutes, and satisfy himself that now, at all



"FLORENCE MADE A MOTION WITH HER HAND TOWARDS HIM, REELED, AND FELL UPON THE FLOOR."

events, there was no one loitering about it. Accordingly he set it open, and stood upon the threshold, keeping a bright look-out, and sweeping the whole street with his spectacles.

"How de do, Captain Gills?" said a voice beside him. The captain, looking down, found that he had been boarded by Mr. Toots while sweeping the horizon.

"How are you, my lad?" replied the captain.

"Well, I'm pretty well, thankee, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots. "You know I'm never

quite what I could wish to be now. I don't expect that I ever shall be any more."

Mr. Toots never approached any nearer than this to the great theme of his life, when in conversation with Captain Cuttle, on account of the agreement between them.

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "if I could have the pleasure of a word with vou, it's—it's rather particular."

"Why, you see, my lad," replied the captain, leading the way into the parlour, "I an't what

you may call exactly free this morning; and therefore, if you can clap on a bit, I should take it kindly."

"Certainly, Captain Gills," replied Mr. Toots, who seldom had any notion of the captain's meaning. "To clap on is exactly what I could wish to do. Naturally."

"If so be, my lad," returned the captain, "do it!"

The captain was so impressed by the possession of his tremendous secret—by the fact of Miss Dombey being at that moment under his roof, while the innocent and unconscious Toots sat opposite to him—that a perspiration broke out on his forehead, and he found it impossible, while slowly drying the same, glazed hat in hand, to keep his eyes off Mr. Toots's face. Mr. Toots, who himself appeared to have some secret reasons for being in a nervous state, was so unspeakably disconcerted by the captain's stare, that after looking at him vacantly for some time in silence, and shifting uneasily on his chair, he said:

"I beg your pardon, Captain Gills, but you don't happen to see anything particular in me, do you?"

"No, my lad," returned the captain. "No."

"Because, you know," said Mr. Toots with a chuckle, "I know I'm wasting away. You needn't at all mind alluding to that. I—I should like it. Burgess and Co. have altered my measure, I'm in that state of thinness. It's a gratification to me. I—I'm glad of it. I—I'd a great deal rather go into a decline, if I could. I'm a mere brute, you know, grazing upon the surface of the earth, Captain Gills."

The more Mr. Toots went on in this way, the more the captain was weighed down by his secret, and stared at him. What with this cause of uneasiness, and his desire to get rid of Mr. Toots, the captain was in such a scared and strange condition, indeed, that if he had been in conversation with a ghost, he could hardly have evinced greater discomposure.

"But I was going to say, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "happening to be this way early this morning—to tell you the truth, I was coming to breakfast with you. As to sleep, you know I never sleep now. I might be a Watchman, except that I don't get any pay, and he's got nothing on his mind."

"Carry on, my lad!" said the captain in an admonitory voice.

"Certainly, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots. "Perfectly true! Happening to be this way early this morning (an hour or so ago), and finding the door shut——"

"What! were *you* waiting there, brother?" demanded the captain.

"Not at all, Captain Gills," returned Mr. Toots. "I didn't stop a moment. I thought you were out. But the person said—— By-the-bye, you *don't* keep a dog, *do* you, Captain Gills?"

The captain shook his head.

"To be sure," said Mr. Toots, "that's exactly what I said. I knew you didn't. There *is* a dog, Captain Gills, connected with—— But excuse me. That's forbidden ground."

The captain stared at Mr. Toots until he seemed to swell to twice his natural size; and again the perspiration broke out on the captain's forehead, when he thought of Diogenes taking it into his head to come down and make a third in the parlour.

"The person said," continued Mr. Toots, "that he had heard a dog barking in the shop: which I knew couldn't be, and I told him so. But he was as positive as if he had seen the dog."

"What person, my lad?" inquired the captain.

"Why, you see, there it is, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, with a perceptible increase in the nervousness of his manner. "It's not for me to say what may have taken place, or what may not have taken place. Indeed, I don't know. I get mixed up with all sorts of things that I don't quite understand, and I think there's something rather weak in my—in my head, in short."

The captain nodded his own as a mark of assent.

"But the person said, as we were walking away," continued Mr. Toots, "that you knew what, under existing circumstances, *might* occur—he said 'might' very strongly—and that, if you were requested to prepare yourself, you would, no doubt, come prepared."

"Person, my lad!" the captain repeated.

"I don't know what person, I'm sure, Captain Gills," replied Mr. Toots; "I haven't the least idea. But coming to the door, I found him waiting there; and he said was I coming back again? and I said yes; and he said did I know you? and I said, yes, I had the pleasure of your acquaintance—you had given me the pleasure of your acquaintance, after some persuasion; and he said, if that was the case, would I say to you what I *have* said, about existing circumstances and coming prepared, and as soon as ever I saw you, would I ask you to step round the corner, if it was only for one minute, on most important business, to Mr. Brogley's the

broker's? Now, I tell you what, Captain Gills—whatever it is, I am convinced it's very important; and, if you like to step round now, I'll wait here till you come back."

The captain, divided between his fear of compromising Florence in some way by not going, and his horror of leaving Mr. Toots in possession of the house with a chance of finding out the secret, was a spectacle of mental disturbance that even Mr. Toots could not be blind to. But that young gentleman, considering his nautical friend as merely in a state of preparation for the interview he was going to have, was quite satisfied, and did not review his own discreet conduct without chuckles.

At length the captain decided, as the lesser of two evils, to run round to Brogley's the broker's: previously locking the door that communicated with the upper part of the house, and putting the key in his pocket. "If so be," said the captain to Mr. Toots, with not a little shame and hesitation, "as you'll excuse my doing of it, brother."

"Captain Gills," returned Mr. Toots, "whatever you do is satisfactory to me."

The captain thanked him heartily, and promising to come back in less than five minutes, went out in quest of the person who had intrusted Mr. Toots with this mysterious message. Poor Mr. Toots, left to himself, lay down upon the sofa, little thinking who had reclined there last, and gazing up at the sky-light and resigning himself to visions of Miss Dombey, lost all heed of time and place.

It was as well that he did so; for, although the captain was not gone long, he was gone much longer than he had proposed. When he came back, he was very pale indeed, and greatly agitated, and even looked as if he had been shedding tears. He seemed to have lost the faculty of speech, until he had been to the cupboard and taken a dram of rum from the case-bottle, when he fetched a deep breath, and sat down in a chair with his hand before his face.

"Captain Gills," said Toots kindly, "I hope and trust there's nothing wrong?"

"Thankee, my lad, not a bit," said the captain. "Quite contrary."

You have the appearance of being over-come, Captain Gills," observed Mr. Toots.

"Why, my lad, I *am* took aback," the captain admitted. "I am."

"Is there anything I can do, Captain Gills?" inquired Mr. Toots. "If there is, make use of me."

The captain removed his hand from his face, looked at him with a remarkable expression of

pity and tenderness, and took him by the hand, and shook it hard.

"No, thankee," said the captain. "Nothing. Only I'll take it as a favour if you'll part company for the present. I believe, brother," wringing his hand again, "that, after Wal'r, and on a different model, you're as good a lad as ever stepped."

"Upon my word and honour, Captain Gills," returned Mr. Toots, giving the captain's hand a preliminary slap before shaking it again, "it's delightful to me to possess your good opinion. Thankee."

"And bear a hand and cheer up," said the captain, patting him on the back. "What! There's more than one sweet creetur in the world!"

"Not to me, Captain Gills," replied Mr. Toots gravely. "Not to me, I assure you. The state of my feelings towards Miss Dombey is of that unspeakable description, that my heart is a desert island, and she lives in it alone. I'm getting more used up every day, and I'm proud to be so. If you could see my legs when I take my boots off, you'd form some idea of what unrequited affection is. I have been prescribed bark, but I don't take it, for I don't wish to have any tone whatever given to my constitution. I'd rather not. This, however, is forbidden ground. Captain Gills, good-bye!"

Captain Cuttle cordially reciprocating the warmth of Mr. Toots's farewell, locked the door behind him, and, shaking his head with the same remarkable expression of pity and tenderness as he had regarded him with before, went up to see if Florence wanted him.

There was an entire change in the captain's face as he went up-stairs. He wiped his eyes with his handkerchief, and he polished the bridge of his nose with his sleeve as he had done already that morning, but his face was absolutely changed. Now, he might have been thought supremely happy; now, he might have been thought sad; but the kind of gravity that sat upon his features was quite new to them, and was as great an improvement to them as if they had undergone some sublimating process.

He knocked softly, with his hook, at Florence's door, twice or thrice; but, receiving no answer, ventured first to peep in, and then to enter: emboldened to take the latter step, perhaps, by the familiar recognition of Diogenes, who, stretched upon the ground by the side of her couch, wagged his tail, and winked his eyes at the captain, without being at the trouble of getting up.

She was sleeping heavily, and moaning in her

sleep; and Captain Cuttle, with a perfect awe of her youth and beauty, and her sorrow, raised her head, and adjusted the coat that covered her, where it had fallen off, and darkened the window a little more, that she might sleep on, and crept out again, and took his post of watch upon the stairs. All this with a touch and tread as light as Florence's own.

Long may it remain in this mixed world a point not easy of decision, which is the more beautiful evidence of the Almighty's goodness—the delicate fingers that are formed for sensitiveness and sympathy of touch, and made to minister to pain and grief, or the rough, hard, Captain Cuttle hand, that the heart teaches, guides, and softens in a moment!

Florence slept upon her couch, forgetful of her homelessness and orphanage, and Captain Cuttle watched upon the stairs. A louder sob or moan than usual brought him sometimes to her door; but by degrees she slept more peacefully, and the captain's watch was undisturbed.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE MIDSHIPMAN MAKES A DISCOVERY.

IT was long before Florence awoke. The day was in its prime, the day was in its wane, and still, uneasy in mind and body, she slept on; unconscious of her strange bed, of the noise and turmoil of the street, and of the light that shone outside the shaded window. Perfect unconsciousness of what had happened in the home that existed no more, even the deep slumber of exhaustion could not produce. Some undefined and mournful recollection of it, dozing uneasily but never sleeping, pervaded all her rest. A dull sorrow, like a half-lulled sense of pain, was always present to her; and her pale cheek was oftener wet with tears than the honest captain, softly putting in his head from time to time at the half-closed door, could have desired to see it.

The sun was getting low in the west, and, glancing out of a red mist, pierced with its rays opposite loopholes and pieces of fretwork in the spires of City churches, as if with golden arrows that struck through and through them—and far away, athwart the river and its flat banks, it was gleaming like a path of fire—and out at sea it was irradiating sails of ships—and, looked towards, from quiet churchyards, upon hill-tops in the country, it was steeping distant prospects

in a flush and glow that seemed to mingle earth and sky together in one glorious suffusion—when Florence, opening her heavy eyes, lay, at first, looking without interest or recognition at the unfamiliar walls around her, and listening in the same regardless manner to the noises in the street. But presently she started up upon her couch, gazed round with a surprised and vacant look, and recollected all.

"My pretty," said the captain, knocking at the door, "what cheer?"

"Dear friend," cried Florence, hurrying to him, "is it you?"

The captain felt so much pride in the name, and was so pleased by the gleam of pleasure in her face when she saw him, that he kissed his hook by way of reply, in speechless gratification.

"What cheer, bright di'mond?" said the captain.

"I have surely slept very long," returned Florence. "When did I come here? Yesterday?"

"This here blessed day, my lady lass," replied the captain.

"Has there been no night? Is it still day?" asked Florence.

"Getting on for evening now, my pretty," said the captain, drawing back the curtain of the window. "See!"

Florence, with her hand upon the captain's arm, so sorrowful and timid, and the captain with his rough face and burly figure, so quietly protective of her, stood in the rosy light of the bright evening sky, without saying a word. However strange the form of speech into which he might have fashioned the feeling, if he had had to give it utterance, the captain felt, as sensibly as the most eloquent of men could have done, that there was something in the tranquil time and in its softened beauty that would make the wounded heart of Florence overflow; and that it was better that such tears should have their way. So not a word spake Captain Cuttle. But when he felt his arm clasped closer, and when he felt the lonely head come nearer to it, and lay itself against his homely, coarse blue sleeve; he pressed it gently with his rugged hand, and understood it, and was understood.

"Better now, my pretty!" said the captain. "Cheerily, cheerily; I'll go down below, and get some dinner ready. Will you come down of your own self afterwards, pretty, or shall Ed'ard Cuttle come and fetch you?"

As Florence assured him that she was quite able to walk down-stairs, the captain, though evidently doubtful of his own hospitality in per-

mitting it, left her to do so, and immediately set about roasting a fowl at the fire in the little parlour. To achieve his cookery with the greater skill, he pulled off his coat, tucked up his wristbands, and put on his glazed hat, without which assistant he never applied himself to any nice or difficult undertaking.

After cooling her aching head and burning face in the fresh water which the captain's care had provided for her while she slept, Florence went to the little mirror to bind up her disordered hair. Then she knew—in a moment, for she shunned it instantly—that on her breast there was the darkening mark of an angry hand.

Her tears burst forth afresh at the sight; she was ashamed and afraid of it; but it moved her to no anger against him. Homeless and fatherless, she forgave him everything; hardly thought that she had need to forgive him, or that she did; but she fled from the idea of him as she had fled from the reality, and he was utterly gone and lost. There was no such Being in the world.

What to do, or where to live, Florence—poor, inexperienced girl!—could not yet consider. She had indistinct dreams of finding, a long way off, some little sisters to instruct, who would be gentle with her, and to whom, under some feigned name, she might attach herself, and who would grow up in their happy home, and marry, and be good to their old governess, and perhaps intrust her, in time, with the education of their own daughters. And she thought how strange and sorrowful it would be, thus to become a grey-haired woman, carrying her secret to the grave, when Florence Dombey was forgotten. But it was all dim and clouded to her now. She only knew that she had no Father upon earth, and she said so, many times, with her suppliant head hidden from all but her Father who was in Heaven.

Her little stock of money amounted to but a few guineas. With a part of this it would be necessary to buy some clothes, for she had none but those she wore. She was too desolate to think how soon her money would be gone—too much a child in worldly matters to be greatly troubled on that score yet, even if her other trouble had been less. She tried to calm her thoughts and stay her tears; to quiet the hurry in her throbbing head, and bring herself to believe that what had happened were but the events of a few hours ago, instead of weeks or months, as they appeared; and went down to her kind protector.

The captain had spread the cloth with great care, and was making some egg sauce in a little

saucepan: basting the fowl from time to time during the process with a strong interest, as it turned and browned on a string before the fire. Having propped Florence up with cushions on the sofa, which was already wheeled into a warm corner for her greater comfort, the captain pursued his cooking with extraordinary skill, making hot gravy in a second little saucepan, boiling a handful of potatoes in a third, never forgetting the egg sauce in the first, and making an impartial round of basting and stirring with the most useful of spoons every minute. Besides these cares, the captain had to keep his eye on a diminutive frying-pan, in which some sausages were hissing and bubbling in a most musical manner; and there was never such a radiant cook as the captain looked in the height and heat of these functions: it being impossible to say whether his face or his glazed hat shone the brighter.

The dinner being at length quite ready, Captain Cuttle dished and served it up with no less dexterity than he had cooked it. He then dressed for dinner, by taking off his glazed hat and putting on his coat. That done, he wheeled the table close, against Florence on the sofa, said grace, unscrewed his hook, screwed his fork into its place, and did the honours of the table.

"My lady lass," said the captain, "cheer up, and try to eat a deal. Stand by, my deary! Liver wing it is. Sarse it is. Sassage it is. And potato!" all which the captain ranged symmetrically on a plate, and, pouring hot gravy on the whole with the useful spoon, set before his cherished guest.

"The whole row o' dead-lights is up for'ard, lady lass," observed the captain encouragingly, "and everythink is made snug. Try and pick a bit, my pretty. If Wal'r was here—"

"Ah! If I had him for my brother now!" cried Florence.

"Don't! don't take on, my pretty!" said the captain; "awast, to oblige me! He *was* your nat'ral born friend like, warn't he, Pet?" Florence had no words to answer with. She only said. "Oh, dear, dear Paul! Oh, Walter!"

"The wery planks she walked on," murmured the captain, looking at her drooping face, "was as high esteemed by Wal'r as the water brooks is by the hart which never rejices! I see him now, the wery day as he was rated on them Dombey books, a speaking of her with his face a glistening with doo—leastways with his modest sentiments—like a new-blown rose, at dinner. Well, well! If our poor Wal'r was

here, my lady lass—or if he could be—for he's drowned, an't he?"

Florence shook her head.

"Yes, yes; drowned," said the captain soothingly. "As I was saying, if he could be here, he'd beg and pray of you, my precious, to pick a leetle bit, with a look-out for your own sweet health. Whereby, hold your own, my lady lass, as if it was for Wal'r's sake, and lay your pretty head to the wind."

Florence essayed to eat a morsel for the captain's pleasure. The captain, meanwhile, who seemed to have quite forgotten his own dinner, laid down his knife and fork, and drew his chair to the sofa.

"Wal'r was a trim lad, warn't he, precious?" said the captain, after sitting for some time silently rubbing his chin, with his eyes fixed upon her, "and a brave lad, and a good lad?"

Florence tearfully assented.

"And he's drowned, Beauty, an't he?" said the captain in a soothing voice.

Florence could not but assent again.

"He was older than you, my lady lass," pursued the captain, "but you was like two children together, at first; warn't you?"

Florence answered "Yes."

"And Wal'r's drowned," said the captain. "An't he?"

The repetition of this inquiry was a curious source of consolation, but it seemed to be one to Captain Cuttle, for he came back to it again and again. Florence, fain to push from her her untasted dinner, and to lie back on her sofa, gave him her hand, feeling that she had disappointed him, though truly wishing to have pleased him after all his trouble, but he held it in his own (which shook as he held it), and, appearing to have quite forgotten all about the dinner and her want of appetite, went on growling at intervals, in a ruminating tone of sympathy, "Poor Wal'r! Ay, ay! Drowned. An't he?" And always waited for her answer, in which the great point of these singular reflections appeared to consist.

The fowl and sausages were cold, and the gravy and the egg sauce stagnant, before the captain remembered that they were on the board, and fell-to with the assistance of Diogenes, whose united efforts quickly dispatched the banquet. The captain's delight and wonder at the quiet housewifery of Florence in assisting to clear the table, arrange the parlour, and sweep up the hearth—only to be equalled by the fervency of his protest when she began to assist him—were gradually raised to that degree, that at last he could not choose but do nothing him-

self, and stand looking at her as if she were some Fairy, daintily performing these offices for him; the red rim on his forehead glowing again in his unspeakable admiration.

But when Florence, taking down his pipe from the mantel-shelf, gave it into his hand, and entreated him to smoke it, the good captain was so bewildered by her attention, that he held it as if he had never held a pipe in all his life. Likewise, when Florence, looking into the little cupboard, took out the case-bottle, and mixed a perfect glass of grog for him, unasked, and set it at his elbow, his ruddy nose turned pale, he felt himself so graced and honoured. When he had filled his pipe in an absolute reverie of satisfaction, Florence lighted it for him—the captain having no power to object, or to prevent her—and resuming her place on the old sofa, looked at him with a smile so loving and so grateful, a smile that showed him so plainly how her forlorn heart turned to him, as her face did, through grief, that the smoke of the pipe got into the captain's throat, and made him cough, and got into the captain's eyes, and made them blink and water.

The manner in which the captain tried to make believe that the cause of these effects lay, hidden in the pipe itself, and the way in which he looked into the bowl for it, and not finding it there, pretended to blow it out of the stem, was wonderfully pleasant. The pipe soon getting into better condition, he fell into that state of repose becoming a good smoker; but sat with his eyes fixed on Florence, and, with a beaming placidity not to be described, and stopping every now and then to discharge a little cloud from his lips, slowly puffed it forth, as if it were a scroll coming out of his mouth, bearing the legend, "Poor Wal'r, ay, ay! Drowned, an't he?" after which he would resume his smoking with infinite gentleness.

Unlike as they were eternally—and there could scarcely be a more decided contrast than between Florence in her delicate youth and beauty, and Captain Cuttle with his knobby face, his great broad weather-beaten person, and his gruff voice—in simple innocence of the world's ways and the world's perplexities and dangers they were nearly on a level. No child could have surpassed Captain Cuttle in inexperience of everything but wind and weather; in simplicity, credulity, and generous trustfulness. Faith, hope, and charity shared his whole nature among them. An odd sort of romance, perfectly unimaginative, yet perfectly unreal, and subject to no considerations of worldly prudence or practicability, was the only partner

they had in his character. As the captain sat and smoked, and looked at Florence, God knows what impossible pictures, in which she was the principal figure, presented themselves to his mind. Equally vague and uncertain, though not so sanguine, were her own thoughts of the life before her; and even as her tears made prismatic colours in the light she gazed at, so, through her new and heavy grief, she already saw a rainbow faintly shining in the far-off sky. A wandering princess and a good monster in a story book might have sat by the fireside, and talked as Captain Cuttle and poor Florence thought—and not have looked very much unlike them.

The captain was not troubled with the faintest idea of any difficulty in retaining Florence, or of any responsibility thereby incurred. Having put up the shutters and locked the door, he was quite satisfied on this head. If she had been a Ward in Chancery it would have made no difference at all to Captain Cuttle. He was the last man in the world to be troubled by any such considerations.

So the captain smoked his pipe very comfortably, and Florence and he meditated after their own manner. When the pipe was out, they had some tea; and then Florence entreated him to take her to some neighbouring shop, where she could buy the few necessities she immediately wanted. It being quite dark, the captain consented: peeping carefully out first, as he had been wont to do in his time of hiding from Mrs. MacStinger; and arming himself with his large stick, in case of an appeal to arms being rendered necessary by any unforeseen circumstance.

The pride Captain Cuttle had in giving his arm to Florence, and escorting her some two or three hundred yards, keeping a bright look-out all the time; and attracting the attention of every one who passed them by his great vigilance and numerous precautions, was extreme. Arrived at the shop, the captain felt it a point of delicacy to retire during the making of the purchases, as they were to consist of wearing apparel; but he previously deposited his tin canister on the counter, and informing the young lady of the establishment that it contained fourteen pound two, requested her, in case that amount of property should not be sufficient to defray the expenses of his niece's little outfit—at the word "niece" he bestowed a most significant look on Florence, accompanied with pantomime, expressive of sagacity and mystery—to have the goodness to "sing out," and he would make up the difference from his pocket. Casually

consulting his big watch, as a deep means of dazzling the establishment, and impressing it with a sense of property, the captain then kissed his hook to his niece, and retired outside the window, where it was a choice sight to see his great face looking in from time to time among the silks and ribbons, with an obvious misgiving that Florence had been spirited away by a back-door.

"Dear Captain Cuttle," said Florence when she came out with a parcel, the size of which greatly disappointed the captain, who had expected to see a porter following with a bale of goods, "I don't want this money, indeed. I have not spent any of it. I have money of my own."

"My lady lass," returned the baffled captain, looking straight down the street before them, "take care on it for me, will you be so good, till such time as I ask ye for it?"

"May I put it back in its usual place," said Florence, "and keep it there?"

The captain was not at all gratified by this proposal, but he answered, "Ay, ay, put it anywhere, my lady lass, so long as you know where to find it again. It an't o' no use to me," said the captain. "I wonder I haven't chucked it away afore now."

The captain was quite disheartened for the moment, but he revived at the first touch of Florence's arm, and they returned with the same precautions as they had come; the captain opening the door of the little Midshipman's berth, and diving in with a suddenness which his great practice only could have taught him. During Florence's slumber in the morning, he had engaged the daughter of an elderly lady, who usually sat under a blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, selling poultry, to come and put her room in order, and render her any little services she required; and this damsel now appearing, Florence found everything about her as convenient and orderly, if not as handsome, as in the terrible dream she had once called Home.

When they were alone again, the captain insisted on her eating a slice of dry toast, and drinking a glass of spiced negus (which he made to perfection); and encouraging her with every kind word and inconsequential quotation, he could possibly think of, led her up-stairs to her bedroom. But he, too, had something on his mind, and was not easy in his manner.

"Good night, dear heart," said Captain Cuttle to her at her chamber door.

Florence raised her lips to his face, and kissed him.

At any other time the captain would have

been overbalanced by such a token of her affection and gratitude; but now, although he was very sensible of it, he looked in her face with even more uneasiness than he had testified before, and seemed unwilling to leave her.

"Poor Wal'r!" said the captain.

"Poor, poor Walter!" sighed Florence.

"Drowned, an't he?" said the captain.

Florence shook her head, and sighed.

"Good night, my lady lass!" said Captain Cuttle, putting out his hand.

"God bless you, dear, kind friend!"

But the captain lingered still.

"Is anything the matter, dear Captain Cuttle?" said Florence, easily alarmed in her then state of mind. "Have you anything to tell me?"

"To tell you, lady lass!" replied the captain, meeting her eyes in confusion. "No, no; what should I have to tell you, pretty? You don't expect as I've got anything good to tell you, sure?"

"No!" said Florence, shaking her head.

The captain looked at her wistfully, and repeated "No,"—still lingering and still showing embarrassment.

"Poor Wal'r!" said the captain. "My Wal'r, as I used to call you! Old Sol Gills's nevy! Welcome to all as knowed you, as the flowers in May! Where are you got to, brave boy? Drowned, an't he?"

Concluding his apostrophe with this abrupt appeal to Florence, the captain bade her good night, and descended the stairs, while Florence remained at the top, holding the candle out to light him down. He was lost in the obscurity, and, judging from the sound of his receding footsteps, was in the act of turning into the little parlour, when his head and shoulders unexpectedly emerged again, as from the deep, apparently for no other purpose than to repeat, "Drowned, an't he, pretty?" For when he had said that in a tone of tender condolence, he disappeared.

Florence was very sorry that she should unwittingly, though naturally, have awakened these associations in the mind of her protector by taking refuge there; and sitting down before the little table where the captain had arranged the telescope and song book, and those other rarities, thought of Walter, and of all that was connected with him in the past, until she could have almost wished to lie down on her bed and fade away. But, in her lonely yearning to the dead whom she had loved, no thought of home—no possibility of going back—no presentation of it as yet existing, or as sheltering her father

—once entered her thoughts. She had seen the murder done. In the last lingering natural aspect in which she had cherished him through so much, he had been torn out of her heart, defaced, and slain. The thought of it was so appalling to her, that she covered her eyes, and shrunk trembling from the least remembrance of the deed, or of the cruel hand that did it. If her fond heart could have held his image after that, it must have broken; but it could not; and the void was filled with a wild dread, that fled from all confronting with its shattered fragments—with such a dread as could have risen out of nothing but the depths of such a love, so wronged.

She dared not look into the glass; for the sight of the darkening mark upon her bosom made her afraid of herself, as if she bore about her something wicked. She covered it up with a hasty, faltering hand, and in the dark; and laid her weary head down, weeping.

The captain did not go to bed for a long time. He walked to and fro in the shop, and in the little parlour, for a full hour, and, appearing to have composed himself by that exercise, sat down with a grave and thoughtful face, and read out of a Prayer-book the forms of prayer appointed to be used at sea. These were not easily disposed of; the good captain being a mighty slow, gruff reader, and frequently stopping at a hard word to give himself such encouragement as "Now, my lad! With a will!" or, "Steady, Ed'ard Cuttle, steady!" which had a great effect in helping him out of any difficulty. Moreover, his spectacles greatly interfered with his powers of vision. But notwithstanding these drawbacks, the captain, being heartily in earnest, read the service to the very last line, and with genuine feeling too; and approving of it very much when he had done, turned in under the counter (but not before he had been up-stairs, and listened at Florence's door), with a serene breast, and a most benevolent visage.

The captain turned out several times in the course of the night, to assure himself that his charge was resting quietly; and once, at day-break, found that she was awake: for she called to know if it were he, on hearing footsteps near her door.

"Yes, my lady lass," replied the captain in a growling whisper. "Are you all right, di'mond?"

Florence thanked him, and said "Yes."

The captain could not lose so favourable an opportunity of applying his mouth to the key-hole, and calling through it, like a hoarse breeze, "Poor Wal'r! Drowned, an't he?"

After which he withdrew, and, turning in again, slept till seven o'clock.

Nor was he free from his uneasy and embarrassed manner all that day; though Florence, being busy with her needle in the little parlour,

was more calm and tranquil than she had been on the day preceding. Almost always, when she raised her eyes from her work, she observed the captain looking at her, and thoughtfully stroking his chin; and he so often hitched his arm-chair



"WHEN HE HAD FILLED HIS PIPE IN AN ABSOLUTE REVERIE OF SATISFACTION, FLORENCE LIGHTED IT FOR HIM."

close to her, as if he were going to say something very confidential, and hitched it away again, as not being able to make up his mind how to begin, that in the course of the day he cruised completely round the parlour in that frail bark, and more than once went ashore

against the wainscot or the closet door, in a very distressed condition.

It was not until the twilight that Captain Cuttle, fairly dropping anchor, at last, by the side of Florence, began to talk at all connectedly. But when the light of the fire was

shining on the walls and ceiling of the little room, and on the tea-board and the cups and saucers that were ranged upon the table, and on her calm face turned towards the flame, and reflecting it in the tears that filled her eyes, the captain broke a long silence thus :

"You never was at sea, my own?"

"No," replied Florence.

"Ay," said the captain reverentially; "it's a almighty element. There's wonders in the deep, my pretty. Think on it, when the winds is roaring and the waves is rowling. Think on it when the stormy nights is so pitch dark," said the captain, solemnly holding up his hook, "as you can't see your hand afore you, excepting when the wiwd lightning reveals the same; and when you drive, drive, drive through the storm and dark, as if you was a driving, head on, to the world without end, evermore, amen, and when found making a note of. Them's the times, my beauty, when a man may say to his messmate (previously a overhauling of the woltume), 'A stiff nor-wester's blowing, Bill; hark, don't you hear it roar now? Lord help 'em, how I pities all unhappy folks ashore now!'" Which quotation, as particularly applicable to the terrors of the ocean, the captain delivered in a most impressive manner, concluding with a sonorous "Stand by!"

"Were you ever in a dreadful storm?" asked Florence.

"Why, ay, my lady lass, I've seen my share of bad weather," said the captain, tremulously wiping his head, "and I've had my share of knocking about; but—but it an't of myself as I was a meaning to speak. Our dear boy," drawing closer to her, "Wal'r, darling, as was drowned."

The captain spoke in such a trembling voice, and looked at Florence with a face so pale and agitated, that she clung to his hand in affright.

"Your face is changed," cried Florence. "You are altered in a moment. What is it? Dear Captain Cuttle, it turns me cold to see you!"

"What! Lady lass," returned the captain, supporting her with his hand, "don't be took aback. No, no! All's well, all's well, my dear. As I was a saying—Wal'r—he's—he's drowned. An't he?"

Florence looked at him intently; her colour came and went; and she laid her hand upon her breast.

"There's perils and dangers on the deep, my beauty," said the captain; "and over many a brave ship, and many and many a bould heart, the secret waters has closed up, and never told

no tales. But there's escapes upon the deep too, and sometimes one man out of a score—ah! maybe out of a hundred, pretty—has been saved by the mercy of God, and come home after being give over for dead, and told of all hands lost. I—I know a story, Heart's Delight," stammered the captain, "o' this natur, as was told to me once; and being on this here tack, and you and me sitting alone by the fire, maybe you'd like to hear me tell it. Would you, deatry?"

Florence, trembling with an agitation which she could not control or understand, involuntarily followed his glance, which went behind her into the shop, where a lamp was burning. The instant that she turned her head, the captain sprung out of his chair, and interposed his hand.

"There's nothing there, my beauty," said the captain. "Don't look there!"

"Why not?" asked Florence.

The captain murmured something about it's being dull that way, and about the fire being cheerful. He drew the door ajar, which had been standing open until now, and resumed his seat. Florence followed him with her eyes, and looked intently in his face.

"The story was about a ship, my lady lass," began the captain, "as sailed out of the Port of London, with a fair wind and in fair weather, bound for—— Don't be took aback, my lady lass, she was only out'ard bound, pretty, only out'ard bound!"

The expression on Florence's face alarmed the captain, who was himself very hot and flurried, and showed scarcely less agitation than she did.

"Shall I go on, Beauty?" said the captain.

"Yes, yes, pray!" cried Florence.

The captain made a gulp as if to get down something that was sticking in his throat, and nervously proceeded:

"That there unfort'nate ship met with such foul weather, out at sea, as don't blow once in twenty year, my darling. There was hurricanes ashore as tore up forests and blowed down towns, and there was gales at sea, in them latitudes, as not the stoutest wessel ever launched could live in. Day arter day that there unfort'nate ship behaved noble, I'm told, and did her duty brave, my pretty, but at one blow a'most her bulwarks was stove in, her masts and rudder carried away, her best mtn swept overboard, and she left to the mercy of the storm as had no mercy, but blowed harder and harder yet, while the waves dashed over her, and beat her in, and every time they come a thundering at her, broke

her like a shell. Every black spot in every mountain of water that rolled away was a bit o' the ship's life or a living man, and so she went to pieces, Beauty, and no grass will never grow upon the graves of them as manned that ship."

"They were not all lost!" cried Florence. "Some were saved!—Was one?"

"Aboard o' that there unfortun'ate wessel," said the captain, rising from his chair, and clenching his hand with prodigious energy and exultation, "was a lad, a gallant lad—as I've heerd tell—that had loved, when he was a boy, to read and talk about brave actions in shipwrecks—I've heerd him!—I've heerd him!—and he remembered o' em in his hour of need; for, when the stoutest hearts and oldest hands was hove down, he was firm and cheery. It warn't the want of objects to like and love ashore that gave him courage; it was his nat'ral mind. I've seen it in his face, when he was no more than a child—ay, many a time!—and when I thought it nothing but his good looks, bless him!"

"And was he saved?" cried Florence. "Was he saved?"

"That brave lad," said the captain,—"look at me, pretty! Don't look round—"

Florence had hardly power to repeat, "Why not?"

"Because there's nothing there, my deary," said the captain. "Don't be took aback, pretty creetur! Don't, for the sake of Wal'r, as was dear to all on us! That there lad," said the captain, "arter working with the best, and standing by the faint-hearted, and never making no complaint nor sign of fear, and keeping up a spirit in all hands that made 'em honour him as if he'd been a admiral,—that lad, along with the second mate and one seaman, was left, of all the beatin' hearts that went aboard that ship, the only living creeturs—lashed to a fragment of the wreck, and drifting on the stormy sea."

"Were they saved?" cried Florence.

"Days and nights they drifted on them endless waters," said the captain, "until at last—no! don't look that way, pretty!—a sail bore down upon 'em, and they was, by the Lord's mercy, took aboard: two living, and one dead."

"Which of them was dead?" cried Florence.

"Not the lad I speak on," said the captain.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!"

"Amen!" returned the captain hurriedly.

"Don't be took aback! A minute more, my lady lass! with a good heart!—Aboard that ship, they went a long voyage, right away across the chart (for there warn't no touching nowhere),

and on that voyage the seaman as was picked up with 'im died. — But he was spared, and——"

The captain, without knowing what he did, had cut a slice of bread from the loaf, and put it on his hook (which was his usual toasting-fork), on which he now held it to the fire; looking behind Florence with great emotion in his face, and suffering the bread to blaze and burn like fuel.

"Was spared," repeated Florence, "and——"

"And come home in that ship," said the captain, still looking in the same direction, "and—don't be frightened, pretty!—and landed; and one morning come cautiously to his own door to take a obserwation, knowing that his friends would think him drowned, when he sheered off at the unexpected——"

"At the unexpected barking of a dog?" cried Florence quickly.

"Yes!" roared the captain. "Steady, darling! courage! Don't look round yet. See there! upon the wall!"

There was the shadow of a man upon the wall close to her. She started up, looked round, and, with a piercing cry, saw Walter Gay behind her!

She had no thought of him but as a brother, a brother rescued from the grave; a shipwrecked brother saved and at her side, and rushed into his arms. In all the world, he seemed to be her hope, her comfort, refuge, natural protector. "Take care of Walter; I was fond of Walter!" The dear remembrance of the plaintive voice that said so, rushed upon her soul like music in the night. "Oh, welcome home, dear Walter! Welcome to this stricken breast!" She felt the words, although she could not utter them, and held him in her pure embrace.

Captain Cuttle, in a fit of delirium, attempted to wipe his head with the blackened toast upon his hook; and finding it an uncongenial substance for the purpose, put it into the crown of his glazed hat, put the glazed hat on with some difficulty, essayed to sing a verse of *Lovely Peg*, broke down at the first word, and retired into the shop, whence he presently came back, express, with a face all flushed and besmeared, and the starch completely taken out of his shirt collar, to say these words:

"Wal'r, my lad, here is a little bit of property as I should wish to make over jintly!"

The captain hastily produced the big watch, the tea-spoons, the sugar-tongs, and the canister, and laying them on the table, swept them with his great hand into Walter's hat; but, in handing

that singular strong box to Walter, he was so overcome again, that he was fain to make another retreat into the shop, and absent himself for a longer space of time than on his first retirement.

But Walter sought him out, and brought him back; and then the captain's great apprehension was, that Florence would suffer from this new shock. He felt it so earnestly, that he turned quite rational, and positively interdicted any further allusion to Walter's adventures for some days to come. Captain Cuttle then became sufficiently composed to relieve himself of the toast in his hat, and to take his place at the tea-board; but finding Walter's grasp upon his shoulder on one side, and Florence whispering her tearful congratulations on the other, the captain suddenly bolted again, and was missing for a good ten minutes.

But never in all his life had the captain's face so shone and glistened as when, at last, he sat stationary at the tea-board looking from Florence to Walter, and from Walter to Florence. Nor was this effect produced or at all heightened by the immense quantity of polishing he had administered to his face with his coat-sleeve during the last half-hour. It was solely the effect of his internal emotions. There was a glory and delight within the captain that spread itself over his whole visage, and made a perfect illumination there.

The pride with which the captain looked upon the bronzed cheek and the courageous eyes of his recovered boy: with which he saw the generous fervour of his youth, and all its frank and hopeful qualities, shining once more in the fresh wholesome manner and the ardent face; would have kindled something of this light in his countenance. The admiration and sympathy with which he turned his eyes on Florence, whose beauty, grace, and innocence could have won no truer or more zealous champion than himself, would have had an equal influence upon him. But the fulness of the glow he shed around him could only have been engendered in his contemplation of the two together, and in all the fancies springing out of that association, that came sparkling and beaming into his head, and danced about it.

How they talked of poor old Unole Sol, and dwelt on every little circumstance relating to his disappearance; how their joy was moderated by the old man's absence, and by the misfortunes of Florence; how they released Diogenes, whom the captain had decoyed up-stairs some time before, lest he should bark again; the captain, though he was in one continual flutter, and made many more short plunges into the shop,

fully comprehended. But he no more dreamed that Walter looked on Florence, as it were, from a new and far-off place; that while his eyes often sought the lovely face, they seldom met its open glance of sisterly affection, but withdrew themselves when hers were raised towards him; than he believed that it was Walter's ghost who sat beside him! He saw them there together in their youth and beauty, and he knew the story of their younger days, and he had no inch of room beneath his great blue waistcoat for anything save admiration of such a pair, and gratitude for their being reunited.

They sat thus until it grew late. The captain would have been content to sit so for a week. But Walter rose to take leave for the night.

"Going, Walter!" said Florence. "Where?"

"He slings his hammock for the present, lady lass," said Captain Cuttle, "round at Brogley's. Within hail, Heart's Delight."

"I am the cause of your going away, Walter," said Florence. "There is a houseless sister in your place."

"Dear Miss Dombey," replied Walter, hesitating—"if it is not too bold to call you so——"

"Walter!" she exclaimed, surprised.

"—If anything could make me happier in being allowed to see and speak to you, would I not be the discovery that I had any means on earth of doing you a moment's service? Where would I not go, what would I not do, for your sake?"

She smiled and called him brother.

"You are so changed," said Walter.

"I changed!" she interrupted.

"—To me," said Walter softly, as if he were thinking aloud, "changed to me. I left you such a child, and find you—oh! something so different——"

"But your sister, Walter. You have not forgotten what we promised to each other when we parted?"

"Forgotten!" But he said no more.

"And if you had—if suffering and danger had driven it from your thoughts—which it has not—you would remember it now, Walter, when you find me poor and abandoned, with no home but this, and no friends but the two who hear me speak!"

"I would! Heaven knows I would!" said Walter.

"Oh, Walter!" exclaimed Florence through her sobs and tears. "Dear Brother! Show me some way through the world—some humble path that I may take alone, and labour in; and sometimes think of you as one who will protect and care for me as for a sister! Oh, help me, Walter, for I need help so much!"

"Miss Dombey! Florence! I would die to help you. . . But your friends are proud and rich. Your father——"

"No, no! Walter!" ~ She shrieked, and put her hands up to her head, in an attitude of terror that transfixed him where he stood. "Don't say that word!"

He never, from that hour, forgot the voice and look with which she stopped him at the name. He felt that if he were to live a hundred years, he never could forget it.

Somewhere—anywhere—but never home! All past, all gone, all lost, and broken up! The whole history of her untold slight and suffering was in the cry and look; and he felt he never could forget it, and he never did.

She laid her gentle face upon the captain's shoulder, and related how and why she had fled. If every sorrowing tear she shed in doing so had been a curse upon the head of him she never named or blamed, it would have been better for him, Walter thought with awe, than to be renounced out of such a strength and might of love.

"There, precious!" said the captain when she ceased; and deep attention the captain had paid to her while she spoke; listening with his glazed hat all awry, and his mouth wide open. "Awast, awast, my eyes! Wal'r, dear lad, sheer off for to-night, and leave the pretty one to me!"

Walter took her hand in both of his, and put it to his lips, and kissed it. He knew now that she was indeed a homeless, wandering fugitive; but, richer to him so than in all the wealth and pride of her right station, she seemed farther off than even on the height that had made him giddy in his boyish dream.

Captain Cuttle, perplexed by no such meditations, guarded Florence to her room, and watched at intervals upon the charmed ground outside her door—for such it truly was to him—until he felt sufficiently easy in his mind about her to turn in under the counter. On abandoning his watch for that purpose, he could not help calling once, rapturously, through the keyhole, "Drowned. An't he, pretty?"—or, when he got down-stairs, making another trial at that verse of Lovely Peg. But it stuck in his throat somehow, and he could make nothing of it; so he went to bed, and dreamed that old Sol Gills was married to Mrs. MacStinger, and kept prisoner by that lady in a secret chamber on a short allowance of victuals.

CHAPTER L.

MR. TOOTS'S COMPLAINT.

HERE was an empty room above-stairs at the Wooden Midshipman's, which, in days of yore, had been Walter's bedroom. Walter, rising up the captain betimes in the morning, proposed that they should carry thither such furniture out of the little parlour as would grace it best, so that Florence might take possession of it when she rose. As nothing could be more agreeable to Captain Cuttle than making himself very red and short of breath in such a cause, he turned to (as he himself said) with a will; and, in a couple of hours, this garret was transformed into a species of land-cabin, adorned with all the choicest movables out of the parlour, inclusive even of the Tartar frigate, which the captain hung up over the chimney-piece with such extreme delight, that he could do nothing for half an hour afterwards but walk backward from it, lost in admiration.

The captain could be induced by no persuasion of Walter's to wind up the big watch, or to take back the canister, or to touch the sugar-tongs and tea-spoons. "No, no, my lad," was the captain's invariable reply to any solicitation of the kind, "I've made that there little property over jintly." These words he repeated with great unction and gravity, evidently believing that they had the virtue of an Act of Parliament, and that, unless he committed himself by some new admission of ownership, no flaw could be found in such a form of conveyance.

It was an advantage of the new arrangement, that besides the greater seclusion it afforded Florence, it admitted of the Midshipman being restored to his usual post of observation, and also of the shop shutters being taken down. The latter ceremony, however little importance the unconscious captain attached to it, was not wholly superfluous; for, on the previous day, so much excitement had been occasioned in the neighbourhood by the shutters remaining unopened, that the instrument-maker's house had been honoured with an unusual share of public observation, and had been intently stared at, from the opposite side of the way, by groups of hungry gazers, at any time between sunrise and sunset. The idlers and vagabonds had been particularly interested in the captain's fate; constantly grovelling in the mud to apply their eyes to the cellar grating, under the shop-window, and delighting their imaginations with the fancy that

they could see a piece of his coat, as he hung in a corner; though this settlement of him was stoutly disputed by an opposite faction, who were of opinion that he lay murdered with a hammer, on the stairs. It was not without exciting some discontent, therefore, that the subject of these rumours was seen early in the morning standing at his shop-door as hale and hearty as if nothing had happened; and the beadle of that quarter, a man of an ambitious character, who had expected to have the distinction of being present at the breaking open of the door, and of giving evidence in full uniform before the coroner, went so far as to say to an opposite neighbour that the chap in the glazed hat had better not try it on there—without more particularly mentioning what—and further, that he, the beadle, would keep his eye upon him.

"Captain Cuttle," said Walter, musing, when they stood resting from their labours at the shop-door, looking down the old familiar street; it being still early in the morning; "nothing at all of Uncle Sol in all that time?"

"Nothing at all, my lad," replied the captain, shaking his head.

"Gone in search of me, dear, kind old man," said Walter; "yet never write to you! But why not? He says, in effect, in this packet that you gave me," taking the paper from his pocket, which had been opened in the presence of the enlightened Bunsby, "that if you never hear from him before opening it, you may believe him dead. Heaven forbid! But you would have heard of him, even if he *were* dead! Some one would have written, surely, by his desire, if he could not; and have said, 'On such a day, there died in my house,' or under my care,' or so forth, 'Mr. Solomon Gills of London, who left this last remembrance and this last request to you.'"

The captain, who had never climbed to such a clear height of probability before, was greatly impressed by the wide prospect it opened, and answered with a thoughtful shake of his head, "Well said, my lad; very well said." *

"I have been thinking of this, or at least," said Walter, colouring, "I have been thinking of one thing and another, all through a sleepless night, and I cannot believe, Captain Cuttle, but that my uncle Sol (Lord bless him!) is alive, and will return. I don't so much wonder at his going away, because, leaving out of consideration that spice of the marvellous which was always in his character, and his great affection for me, before which every other consideration of his life became nothing, as no one ought to

know so well as I who had the best of fathers in him,"—Walter's voice was indistinct and husky here, and he looked away, along the street,—“leaving that out of consideration, I say, I have often read and heard of people who, having some near and dear relative, who was supposed to be shipwrecked at sea, have gone down to live on that part of the seashore where any tidings of the missing ship might be expected to arrive, though only an hour or two sooner than elsewhere, or have even gone upon her track to the place whither she was bound, as if their going would create intelligence. I think I should do such a thing myself, as soon as another, or sooner than many, perhaps. But why my uncle shouldn't write to you, when he so clearly intended to do so, or how he should die abroad, and you not know it through some other hand, I cannot make out."

Captain Cuttle observed, with a shake of his head, that Jack Bunsby himself hadn't made it out, and that he was a man as could give a pretty taut opinion too.

"If my uncle had been a heedless young man, likely to be entrapped by jovial company to some drinking-place, where he was to be got rid of for the sake of what money he might have about him," said Walter; "or if he had been a reckless sailor, going ashore with two or three months' pay in his pocket, I could understand his disappearing, and leaving no trace behind. But, being what he was—and is, I hope—I can't believe it."

"Wal'r, my lad," inquired the captain, wistfully eyeing him as he pondered and pondered, "what do you make of it, then?"

"Captain Cuttle," returned Walter, "I don't know what to make of it. I suppose he never *has* written! There is no doubt about that?"

"If so be that Sol Gills wrote, my lad," replied the captain argumentatively, "where's his dispatch?"

"Say that he intrusted it to some private hand," suggested Walter, "and that it has been forgotten, or carelessly thrown aside, or lost. Even that is more probable to me than the other event. In short, I not only cannot bear to contemplate that other event, Captain Cuttle, but I can't, and won't."

"Hope, you see, Wal'r," said the captain sagely, "Hope. It's that as animates you. Hope is a buoy, for which you overhaul your Little Warbler, sentimental diwision, but Lord, my lad, like any other buoy, it only floats; it can't be steered nowhere. Along with the figure-head of Hope," said the captain, "there's a anchor: but what's the good of my having

a anchor, if I can't find no bottom to let it go in?"

Captain Cuttle said this rather in his character of a sagacious citizen and householder, bound to impart a morsel from his stores of wisdom to an inexperienced youth; than in his own proper person. Indeed, his face was quite luminous as he spoke, with new hope, caught from Walter; and he appropriately concluded by slapping him on the back; and saying, with enthusiasm, "Hooroar, my lad! Individually, I'm o' your opinion."

Walter, with his cheerful laugh, returned the salutation, and said:

"Only one word more about my uncle at present, Captain Cuttle. I suppose it is impossible that he can have written in the ordinary course—by mail packet, or ship letter, you understand——"

"Ay, ay, my lad," said the captain approvingly.

"—And that you have missed the letter anyhow?"

"Why, Wal'r," said the captain, turning his eyes upon him with a faint approach to a severe expression, "an't I been on the look-out for any tidings of that man o' science, old Sol Gills, your uncle, day and night, ever since I lost him? An't my heart been heavy and watchful always, along of him and you? Sleeping and waking, an't I been upon my post, and wouldn't I have scorned to quit it while this here Midshipman held together?"

"Yes, Captain Cuttle," replied Walter, grasping his hand, "I know you would, and I know how faithful and earnest all you say and feel is. I am sure of it. You don't doubt that I am as sure of it as I am that my foot is again upon this door-step, or that I again have hold of this true hand. Do you?"

"No, no, Wal'r," returned the captain with his beaming face.

"I'll hazard no more conjectures," said Walter, fervently shaking the hard hand of the captain, who shook his with no less good-will. "All I will add is, Heaven forbid that I should touch my uncle's possessions, Captain Cuttle! Everything that he left here shall remain in the care of the truest of stewards and kindest of men—and if his name is not Cuttle, he has no name! Now, best of friends, about—Miss Dombey."

There was a change in Walter's manner as he came to these two words; and, when he uttered them, all his confidence and cheerfulness appeared to have deserted him.

"I thought, before, Miss Dombey stopped

me when I spoke of her father last night," said Walter,—"you remember how?"

The captain well remembered; and shook his head.

"I thought," said Walter, "before that, that we had but one hard duty to perform, and that it was to prevail upon her to communicate with her friends, and to return home."

The captain muttered a feeble "Awast!" or a "Stand by!" or something or other, equally pertinent to the occasion; but it was rendered so extremely feeble by the total discomfiture with which he received this announcement, that what it was was mere matter of conjecture.

"But," said Walter, "that is over. I think so no longer. I would sooner be put back again upon that piece of wreck, on which I have so often floated, since my preservation, in my dreams, and there left to drift, and drive, and die!"

"Hooroar, my lad!" exclaimed the captain in a burst of uncontrollable satisfaction. "Hooroar! Hooroar! Hooroar!"

"To think that she, so young, so good, and beautiful," said Walter, "so delicately brought up, and born to such a different fortune, should strive with the rough world! But we have seen the gulf that cuts off all behind her, though no one but herself can know how deep it is—and there is no return."

Captain Cuttle, without quite understanding this, greatly approved of it, and observed, in a tone of strong corroboration, that the wind was right abaft.

"She ought not to be alone here; ought she, Captain Cuttle?" said Walter anxiously.

"Well, my lad," replied the captain after a little sagacious consideration, "I don't know. You being here to keep her company, you see, and you two being jintly——"

"Dear Captain Cuttle!" remonstrated Walter.

"I being here! Miss Dombey, in her guileless, innocent heart, regards me as her adopted brother; but what would the guile and guilt of *my* heart be, if I pretended to believe that I had any right to approach her familiarly in that character—if I pretended to forget that I am bound, in honour, not to do it!"

"Wal'r, my lad," hinted the captain, with some revival of his discomfiture, "an't there no other character as——"

"Oh!" returned Walter, "would you have me die in her esteem—in such esteem as hers—and put a veil between myself and her angel's face, for ever, by taking advantage of her being here for refuge, so trusting and so unprotected, to endeavour to exalt myself into her lover?"

What do I say? There is no one in the world who would be more opposed to me, if I could do so, than you."

"Wal'r, my lad," said the captain, drooping more and more, "providing as there is any just cause or impediment why two persons should not be jined together in the house of bondage, for which you'll overhaul the place, and make a note, I hope I should declare it as promised and wowed in the banns. So there an't no other character; an't there, my lad?"

Walter briskly waved his hand in the negative.

"Well, my lad," growled the captain slowly, "I won't deny but what I find myself wery much down by the head, along o' this here, or but what I've gone clean about. But as to Lady-lass, Wal'r, mind you, wot's respect and duty to her is respect and duty in my articles, howsumever disappointing; and therefore I follows in your wake, my lad, and feel as you are, no doubt, acting up to yourself. And there an't no other character, an't there?" said the captain, musing over the ruins of his fallen castle with a very despondent face.

"Now, Captain Cuttle," said Walter, starting a fresh point with a gayer air, to cheer the captain up—but nothing could do that; he was too much concerned—"I think we should exert ourselves to find some one who would be a proper attendant for Miss Dombey while she remains here, and who may be trusted. None of her relations may. It's clear Miss Dombey feels that they are all subservient to her father. What has become of Susan?"

"The young woman?" returned the captain. "It's my belief as she was sent away again the will of Heart's Delight. I made a signal for her when Lady-lass first come, and she rated of her wery high, and said she had been gone a long time."

"Then," said Walter, "do you ask Miss Dombey where she's gone, and we'll try to find her. The morning's getting on, and Miss Dombey will soon be rising. You are her best friend. Wait for her up-stairs, and leave me to take care of all down here."

The captain, very crest-fallen indeed, echoed the sigh with which Walter said this, and complied. Florence was delighted with her new room, anxious to see Walter, and overjoyed at the prospect of greeting her old friend Susan. But Florence could not say where Susan was gone, except that it was in Essex, and no one could say, she remembered, unless it were Mr. Toots.

With this information the melancholy captain

returned to Walter, and gave him to understand that Mr. Toots was the young gentleman whom he had encountered on the door-step, and that he was a friend of his, and that he was a young gentleman of property, and that he hopelessly adored Miss Dombey. The captain also related how the intelligence of Walter's supposed fate had first made him acquainted with Mr. Toots, and how there was solemn treaty and compact between them that Mr. Toots should be mute upon the subject of his love.

The question then was, whether Florence could trust Mr. Toots, and Florence saying with a smile, "Oh yes, with her whole heart!" it became important to find out where Mr. Toots lived. This Florence didn't know, and the captain had forgotten; and the captain was telling Walter, in the little parlour, that Mr. Toots was sure to be there soon, when in came Mr. Toots himself.

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, rushing into the parlour without any ceremony, "I'm in a state of mind bordering on distraction!"

Mr. Toots had discharged those words, as from a mortar, before he observed Walter, whom he recognised with what may be described as a chuckle of misery.

"You'll excuse me, sir," said Mr. Toots, holding his forehead, "but I'm at present in that state that my brain is going, if not gone, and anything approaching to politeness in an individual so situated would be a hollow mockery. Captain Gills, I beg to request the favour of a private interview."

"Why, brother," returned the captain, taking him by the hand, "you are the man as we was on the look-out for."

"Oh, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "what a look-out that must be of which I am the object! I haven't dared to shave, I'm in that rash state. I haven't had my clothes brushed. My hair is matted together. I told the Chicken that if he offered to clean my boots, I'd stretch him a Corpse before me!"

All these indications of a disordered mind were verified in Mr. Toots's appearance, which was wild and savage.

"See here, brother," said the captain. "This here's old Sol Gills's nevy, Wal'r. Him as was supposed to have perished at sea."

Mr. Toots took his hand from his forehead, and stared at Walter.

"Good gracious me!" stammered Mr. Toots. "What a complication of misery! How de do? I—I—I'm afraid you must have got wery wet. Captain Gills, will you allow me a word in the shop?"

He took the captain by the coat, and going out with him, whispered :

"That, then, Captain Gills, is the party you spoke of, when you said that he and Miss Dombey were made for one another?"

"Why, ay, my lad," replied the disconsolate captain; "I was of that mind once."

"And at this time!" exclaimed Mr. Toots, with his hand to his forehead again. "Of all others!—a hated rival! At least, he an't a hated rival," said Mr. Toots, stopping short, on second thoughts, and taking away his hand; "what should I hate him for? No. If my affection has been truly disinterested, Captain Gills, let me prove it now!"

Mr. Toots shot back abruptly into the parlour, and said, wringing Walter by the hand:

"How de do? I hope you didn't take any cold. I—I shall be very glad if you'll give me the pleasure of your acquaintance. I wish you many happy returns of the day. Upon my word and honour," said Mr. Toots, warming as he became better acquainted with Walter's face and figure, "I'm very glad to see you!"

"Thank you heartily," said Walter. "I couldn't desire a more genuine and genial welcome."

"Couldn't you, though?" said Mr. Toots, still shaking his hand. "It's very kind of you. I'm much obliged to you. How de do? I hope you left everybody quite well over the—that is, upon the—I mean wherever you came from last, you know."

All these good wishes, and better intentions. Walter responded to manfully.

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots; "I should wish to be strictly honourable; but I trust I may be allowed, now, to allude to a certain subject that——"

"Ay, ay, my lad," returned the captain. "Freely, freely."

"Then, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "and Lieutenant Walters, are you aware that the most dreadful circumstances have been happening at Mr. Dombey's house, and that Miss Dombey herself has left her father, who, in my opinion," said Mr. Toots with great excitement, "is a brute, that it would be a flattery to call a— a marble monument, or a bird of prey—and that she is not to be found, and has gone no one knows where?"

"May I ask how you heard this?" inquired Walter.

"Lieutenant Walters," said Mr. Toots, who had arrived at that appellation by a process peculiar to himself; probably by jumbling up his Christian name with the seafaring profession,

and supposing some relationship between him and the captain, which would extend, as a matter of course, to their titles; "Lieutenant Walters, I can have no objection to make a straightforward reply. The fact is, that feeling extremely interested in everything that relates to Miss Dombey—not for any selfish reason, Lieutenant Walters, for I am well aware that the most agreeable thing I could do for all parties would be to put an end to my existence, which can only be regarded as an inconvenience—I have been in the habit of bestowing a trifle now and then upon a footman; a most respectable young man, of the name of Towlinson, who has lived in the family some time; and Towlinson informed me, yesterday evening, that this was the state of things. Since which, Captain Gills—and Lieutenant Walters—I have been perfectly frantic, and have been lying down on the sofa all night, the Ruin you behold."

"Mr. Toots," said Walter, "I am happy to be able to relieve your mind. Pray calm yourself. Miss Dombey is safe and well."

"Sir!" cried Mr. Toots, starting from his chair and shaking hands with him anew, "the relief is so excessive and unspeakable, that if you were to tell me now that Miss Dombey was married even, I could smile. Yes, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, appealing to him, "upon my soul and body, I really think, whatever I might do to myself immediately afterwards, that I could smile, I am so relieved."

"It will be a greater relief and delight still, to such a generous mind as yours," said Walter, not at all slow in returning his greeting, "to find that you can render service to Miss Dombey. Captain Cuttle, will you have the kindness to take Mr. Toots up-stairs?"

The captain beckoned to Mr. Toots, who followed him with a bewildered countenance, and, ascending to the top of the house, was introduced, without a word of preparation from his conductor, into Florence's new retreat.

Poor Mr. Toots's amazement and pleasure at sight of her were such, that they could find a vent in nothing but extravagance. He ran up to her, seized her hand, kissed it, dropped it, seized it again, fell upon one knee, shed tears, chuckled, and was quite regardless of his danger of being pinned by Diogenes, who, inspired by the belief that there was something hostile to his mistress in these demonstrations, worked round and round him, as if only undecided at what particular point to go in for the assault, but quite resolved to do him a fearful mischief.

"Oh, 'Di, you bad, forgetful dog! Dear Mr. Toots, I am so rejoiced to see you!"

"Thankee," said Mr. Toots, "I am pretty well, I'm much obliged to you, Miss Dombey. I hope all the family are the same?"

Mr. Toots said this without the least notion of what he was talking about, and sat down on a chair, staring at Florence with the liveliest contentment of delight and despair going on in his face that any face could exhibit.

"Captain Gills and Lieutenant Walters have mentioned, Miss Dombey," gasped Mr. Toots, "that I can do you some service. If I could by any means wash out the remembrance of that day at Brighton, when I conducted myself—much more like a Parricide than a person of independent property," said Mr. Toots with severe self-accusation, "I should sink into the silent tomb with a gleam of joy."

"Pray, Mr. Toots," said Florence, "do not wish me to forget anything in our acquaintance. I never can, believe me. You have been far too kind and good to me always."

"Miss Dombey," returned Mr. Toots, "your consideration for my feelings is a part of your angelic character. Thank you a thousand times. It's of no consequence at all."

"What we thought of asking you," said Florence, "is, whether you remember where Susan, whom you were so kind as to accompany to the coach-office when she left me, is to be found."

"Why, I do not certainly, Miss Dombey," said Mr. Toots after a little consideration, "remember the exact name of the place that was on the coach; and I do, recollect that she said he was not going to stop there, but was going farther on. But, Miss Dombey, if your object is to find her, and to have her here, myself and the Chicken will produce her with every dispatch that devotion on my part, and great intelligence on the Chicken's, can insure."

Mr. Toots was so manifestly delighted and revived by the prospect of being useful, and the disinterested sincerity of his devotion was so unquestionable, that it would have been cruel to refuse him. Florence, with an instinctive delicacy, forbore to urge the least obstacle, though she did not forbear to overpower him with thanks; and Mr. Toots proudly took the commission upon himself for immediate execution.

"Miss Dombey," said Mr. Toots, touching her proffered hand, with a pang of hopeless love, visibly shooting through him, and flashing out in his face, "good-bye! Allow me to take the liberty of saying that your misfortunes make me perfectly wretched, and that you may trust me,

next to Captain Gills himself. I am quite aware, Miss Dombey, of my own deficiencies—they're not of the least consequence, thank you—but I am entirely to be relied upon, I do assure you. Miss Dombey."

With that Mr. Toots came out of the room again, accompanied by the captain, who, standing at a little distance, holding his hat under his arm and arranging his scattered locks with his hook, had been a not uninterested witness of what passed. And when the door closed behind them, the light of Mr. Toots's life was darkly clouded again.

"Captain Gills," said that gentleman, stopping near the bottom of the stairs, and turning round, "to tell you the truth, I am not in a frame of mind, at the present moment, in which I could see Lieutenant Walters with that entirely friendly feeling towards him that I should wish to harbour in my breast. We cannot always command our feelings, Captain Gills, and I should take it as a particular favour if you'd let me out at the private door."

"Brother," returned the captain, "you shall shape your own course. Whatever course you take is plain and seaman-like, I'm wery sure."

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "you're extremely kind. Your good opinion is a consolation to me. There is one thing," said Mr. Toots, standing in the passage behind the half-opened door, "that I hope you'll bear in mind, Captain Gills, and that I should wish Lieutenant Walters to be made acquainted with. I have quite come into my property now, you know, and—and I don't know what to do with it. If I could be at all useful in a pecuniary point of view, I should glide into the silent tomb with ease and smoothness."

Mr. Toots said no more, but slipped out quietly, and shut the door upon himself, to cut the captain off from any reply.

Florence thought of this good creature, long after he had left her, with mingled emotions of pain and pleasure. He was so honest and warm-hearted, that to see him again, and be assured of his truth to her in her distress, was a joy and comfort beyond all price; but, for that very reason, it was so affecting to think that she caused him a moment's unhappiness, or ruffled, by a breath, the harmless current of his life, that her eyes filled with tears, and her bosom overflowed with pity. Captain Cuttle, in his different way, thought much of Mr. Toots too; and so did Walter; and when the evening came, and they were all sitting together in Florence's

new room, Walter praised him in a most impassioned manner, and told Florence what he had said on leaving the house, with every graceful setting-off in the way of comment and appreciation that his honesty and sympathy could surround it with.

Mr. Toots did not return upon the next day, or the next, or for several days; and, in the meanwhile, Florence, without any new alarm, lived like a quiet bird in a cage, at the top of the old instrument-maker's house. But Florence drooped and hung her head more and more plainly as the days went on; and the expression that had been seen in the face of the dead child was often turned to the sky from her high window, as if it sought his angel out, on the bright shore of which he had spoken: lying on his little bed.

Florence had been weak and delicate of late, and the agitation she had undergone was not without its influences on her health. But it was no bodily illness that affected her now. She was distressed in mind; and the cause of her distress was Walter.

Interested in her, anxious for her, proud and glad to serve her, and showing all this with the enthusiasm and ardour of his character, Florence saw that he avoided her. All the long day through, he seldom approached her room. If she asked for him, he came, again for the moment as earnest and as bright as she remembered him when she was a lost child in the staring streets; but he soon became constrained—her quick affection was too watchful not to know it—and uneasy, and soon left her. Unsought, he never came, all day, between the morning and the night. When the evening closed in, he was always there, and that was her happiest time, for then she half believed that the old Walter of her childhood was not changed. But, even then, some trivial word, look, or circumstance would show her that there was an indefinable division between them which could not be passed.

And she could not but see that these revelations of a great alteration in Walter manifested themselves in despite of his utmost efforts to hide them. In his consideration for her, she thought, and in the earnestness of his desire to spare her any wound from his kind hand, he resorted to innumerable little artifices and disguises. So much the more did Florence feel the greatness of the alteration in him; so much the oftener did she weep at this estrangement of her brother.

The good captain—her untiring, tender, ever-zealous friend—saw it too, Florence thought,

and it pained him. He was less cheerful and hopeful than he had been at first, and would steal looks at her and Walter by turns, when they were all three together of an evening, with quite a sad face.

Florence resolved, at last, to speak to Walter. She believed she knew now what the cause of his estrangement was, and she thought it would be a relief to her full heart, and would set him more at ease, if she told him she had found it out, and quite submitted to it, and did not reproach him.

It was on a certain Sunday afternoon that Florence took this resolution. The faithful captain, in an amazing shirt collar, was sitting by her, reading with his spectacles on, and she asked him where Walter was.

"I think he's down below, my lady lass," returned the captain.

"I should like to speak to him," said Florence, rising hurriedly, as if to go down-stairs.

"I'll rouse him up here, Beauty," said the captain, "in a trice."

Thereupon the captain, with much alacrity, shouldered his book—for he made it a point of duty to read none but very large books on a Sunday, as having a more staid appearance: and had bargained, years ago, for a prodigious volume at a bookstall, five lines of which utterly confounded him at any time, inasmuch that he had not yet ascertained of what subject it treated—and withdrew. Walter soon appeared.

"Captain Cuttle tells me, Miss Dombey—" he eagerly began on coming in—but stopped when he saw her face.

"You are not so well to-day. You look distressed. You have been weeping."

He spoke so kindly, and with such a fervent tremor in his voice, that the tears gushed into her eyes at the sound of his words.

"Walter," said Florence gently, "I am not quite well, and I've been weeping. I want to speak to you."

He sat down opposite to her, looking at her beautiful and innocent face; and his own turned pale, and his lips trembled.

"You said, upon the night when I knew that you were saved—and oh! dear Walter, what I felt that night, and what I hoped!"

He put his trembling hand upon the table between them, and sat looking at her.

"—That I was changed. I was surprised to hear you say so, but I understand, now, that I am. Don't be angry with me, Walter. I was too much overjoyed to think of it then."

She seemed a child to him again. It was the ingenious, confiding, loving child he saw and

heard. Not the dear woman at whose feet he would have laid the riches of the earth.

"You remember the last time I saw you, Walter, before you went away?"

He put his hand into his breast, and took out a little purse.

"I have always worn it round my neck! If I had gone down in the deep, it would have been with me at the bottom of the sea."

"And you will wear it still, Walter, for my old sake?"

"Until I die!"

She laid her hand on his, as fearlessly and simply as if not a day had intervened since she gave him the little token of remembrance.

"I am glad of that. I shall be always glad to think so, Walter. Do you recollect that a thought of this change seemed to come into our minds at the same time that evening, when we were talking together?"

"No!" he answered in a wondering tone.

"Yes, Walter. I had been the means of injuring your hopes and prospects even then. I feared to think so then, but I know it now. If you were able then, in your generosity, to hide from me that you knew it too, you cannot do so now, although you try as generously as before. You *do*. I thank you for it, Walter, deeply, truly; but you cannot succeed. You have suffered too much in your own hardships, and in those of your dearest relation, quite to overlook the innocent cause of all the peril and affliction that has befallen you. You cannot quite forget me in that character, and we can be brother and sister no longer. But, dear Walter, do not think that I complain of you in this. I might have known it—ought to have known it—but forgot it in my joy. All I hope is, that you may think of me less irksomely when this feeling is no more a secret one; and all I ask is, Walter, in the name of the poor child who was your sister once, that you will not struggle with yourself, and pain yourself, for my sake, now that I know all."

Walter had looked upon her, while she said this, with a face so full of wonder and amazement, that it had room for nothing else. Now he caught up the hand that touched his, so entreatingly, and held it between his own.

"Oh, Miss Dombey," he said, "is it possible that while I have been suffering so much, in striving with my sense of what is due to you, and must be rendered to you, I have made you suffer what your words disclose to me. Never, never, before Heaven, have I thought of you but as the single bright, pure, blessed recollection of my boyhood and my youth. Never have I from

the first, and never shall I to the last, regard your part in my life but as something sacred, never to be lightly thought of, never to be esteemed enough, never, until death, to be forgotten. Again to see you look, and hear you speak, as you did on that night when we parted, is happiness to me that there are no words to utter; and to be loved and trusted as your brother is the next great gift I could receive and prize!"

"Walter," said Florence, looking at him earnestly, but with a changing face, "what is that which is due to me, and must be rendered to me, at the sacrifice of all this?"

"Respect," said Walter in a low tone. "Reverence."

The colour dawned in her face, and she timidly and thoughtfully withdrew her hand; still looking at him with unabated earnestness.

"I have not a brother's right," said Walter.

"I have not a brother's claim. I left a child. I find a woman."

The colour overspread her face. She made a gesture as if of entreaty that he would say no more, and her face dropped upon her hands.

They were both silent for a time; she weeping.

"I owe it to a heart so trusting, pure, and good," said Walter, "even to tear myself from it, though I rend my own. How dare I say it is my sister's?"

She was weeping still.

"If you had been happy; surrounded as you should be by loving and admiring friends, and by all that makes the station you were born to enviable," said Walter; "and if you had called me brother then, in your affectionate remembrance of the past, I could have answered to the name from my distant place, with no inward assurance that I wronged your spotless truth by doing so. But here—and now!"

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Walter! Forgive my having wronged you so much. I had no one to advise me. I am quite alone."

"Florence!" said Walter passionately, "I am hurried on to say what I thought, but a few moments ago, nothing could have forced from my lips. If I had been prosperous; if I had any means or hope of being one day able to restore you to a station near your own; I would have told you that there was one name you might bestow upon me—a right above all others to protect and cherish you—that I was worthy of in nothing but the love and honour that I bore you, and in my whole heart being yours. I would have told you that it was the only claim that you could give me to defend and guard you,

which I dare accept and dare assert ; but that, if I had that right, I would regard it as a trust so precious and so priceless, that the undivided truth and fervour of my life would poorly acknowledge its worth."

The head was still bent down, the tears still falling, and the bosom swelling with its sobs.

"Dear Florence! dearest Florence! whom I called so in my thoughts before I could consider how presumptuous and wild it was. One last time let me call you by your own dear name, and touch this gentle hand in token of your sisterly forgetfulness of what I have said."

She raised her head, and spoke to him with such a solemn sweetness in her eyes; with such a calm, bright, placid smile shining on him through her tears; with such a low, soft tremble in her frame and voice; that the innermost chords of his heart were touched, and his sight was dim as he listened.

"No, Walter, I cannot forget it. I would not forget it for the world. Are you—are you very poor?"

"I am but a wanderer," said Walter, "making voyages to live across the sea. That is my calling now."

"Are you soon going away again, Walter?"

"Very soon."

She sat looking at him for a moment; then timidly put her trembling hand in his.

"If you will take me for your wife, Walter, I will love you dearly. If you will let me go with you, Walter, I will go to the world's end without fear. I can give up nothing for you—I have nothing to resign, and no one to forsake; but all my love and life shall be devoted to you, and with my last breath I will breathe your name to God, if I have sense and memory left."

He caught her to his heart, and laid her cheek against his own, and now, no more repulsed, no more forlorn, she wept indeed upon the breast of her dear lover.

Blessed Sunday bells, ringing so tranquilly in their entranced and happy ears! Blessed Sunday peace and quiet, harmonising with the calmness in their souls, and making holy air around them! Blessed twilight stealing on, and shading her so soothingly and gravely as she falls asleep, like a hushed child, upon the bosom she has clung to!

Oh load of love and trustfulness that lies so lightly there! Ay, look down on the closed eyes, Walter, with a proudly tender gaze; for in all the wide wide world they seek but thee now—only thee!

until it was quite dark. He took the chair on which Walter had been sitting, and looked up at the sky-light, until the day, by little and little, faded away, and the stars peeped down. He lighted a candle, lighted a pipe, smoked it out, and wondered what on earth was going on up-stairs, and why they didn't call him to tea.

Florence came to his side while he was in the height of his wonderment.

"Ay! lady-lass!" cried the captain. "Why, you and Wal'r have had a long spell o' talk, my beauty."

Florence put her little hand round one of the great buttons of his coat, and said, looking down into his face:

"Dear captain, I want to tell you something, if you please."

The captain raised his head pretty smartly to hear what it was. Catching by this means a more distinct view of Florence, he pushed back his chair, and himself with it, as far as they could go.

"What! Heart's Delight!" cried the captain, suddenly elated. "Is it that?"

"Yes!" said Florence eagerly.

"Wal'r! Husband! THAT?" roared the captain, tossing up his glazed hat into the sky-light.

"Yes!" cried Florence, laughing and crying together.

The captain immediately hugged her; and then, picking up the glazed hat and putting it on, drew her arm through his, and conducted her up-stairs again; where he felt that the great joke of his life was now to be made.

"What, Wal'r, my lad!" said the captain, looking in at the door, with his face like an amiable warming-pan. "So there an't no other character, an't there?"

He had like to have suffocated himself with this pleasantry, which he repeated at least forty times during tea; polishing his radiant face with the sleeve of his coat, and dabbing his head all over with his pocket-handkerchief, in the intervals. But he was not without a graver source of enjoyment to fall back upon, when so disposed, for he was repeatedly heard to say in an under-tone, as he looked with ineffable delight at Walter and Florence:

"Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, you never shaped a better course in your life than when you made that there little property over jintly!"

The captain remained in the little parlour

CHAPTER LI.

MR. DOMBEY AND THE WORLD.

WHAT is the proud man doing while the days go by? Does he ever think of his daughter, or wonder where she is gone? Does he suppose she has come home, and is

leading her old life in the weary house? No one can answer for him. He has never uttered her name since. His household dread him too much to approach a subject on which he is resolutely dumb; and the only person who dare question him, he silences immediately.

"My dear Paul!" murmurs his sister, sidling



"PLESSED TWILIGHT STEALING ON, AND SHADING HER SO SOOTHINGLY AND GRAVELY AS SHE FALLS ASLEEP, LIKE A HUSHED CHILD, UPON THE BOSOM SHE HAS CLUNG TO!"

into the room on the day of Florence's departure, "your wife! that upstart woman! Is it possible that what I hear confusedly is true, and that this is her return for your unparalleled devotion to her; extending, I am sure, even to

the sacrifice of your own relations to her caprices and haughtiness? My poor brother!"

With this speech, feelingly reminiscent of her not having been asked to dinner on the day of the first party, Mrs. Chick makes great use of

her pocket-handkerchief, and falls on Mr. Dombey's neck. But Mr. Dombey frigidly lifts her off, and hands her to a chair.

"I thank you, Louisa," he says, "for this mark of your affection; but desire that our conversation may refer to any other subject. When I bewail my fate, Louisa, or express myself as being in want of consolation, you can offer it, if you will have the goodness."

"My dear Paul," rejoins his sister, with her handkerchief to her face, and shaking her head, "I know your great spirit, and will say no more upon a theme so painful and revolting;" on the heads of which two adjectives Mrs. Chick visits scathing indignation; "but pray let me ask you—though I dread to hear something that will shock and distress me—that unfortunate child, Florence——"

"Louisa!" says her brother sternly, "silence! Not another word of this!"

Mrs. Chick can only shake her head, and use her handkerchief, and moan over degenerate Dombey's, who are no Dombey's. But whether Florence has been inculcated in the flight of Edith, or has followed her, or has done too much, or too little, or anything, or nothing, she has not the least idea.

He goes on, without deviation, keeping his thoughts and feelings close within his own breast, and imparting them to no one. He makes no search for his daughter. He may think that she is with his sister, or that she is under his own roof. He may think of her constantly, or he may never think about her. It is all one for any sign he makes.

But this is sure: he does *not* think that he has lost her. He has no suspicion of the truth. He has lived too long shut up in his towering supremacy, seeing her, a patient gentle creature, in the path below it, to have any fear of that. Shaken as he is by his disgrace, he is not yet humbled to the level earth. The root is broad and deep, and, in the course of years, its fibres have spread out and gathered nourishment from everything around it. The tree is struck; but not down.

Though he hide the world within him from the world without—which he believes has but one purpose for the time, and that to watch him eagerly wherever he goes—he cannot hide those rebel traces of it which escape in hollow eyes and cheeks, a haggard forehead, and a moody, brooding air. Impenetrable as before, he is still an altered man; and, proud as ever, he is humbled, or those marks would not be there.

The world. What the world thinks of him, how it looks at him, what it sees in him, and

what it says—this is the haunting demon of his mind. It is everywhere where he is; and, worse than that, it is everywhere where he is not. It comes out with him among his servants, and yet he leaves it whispering behind; he sees it pointing after him in the street; it is waiting for him in his counting-house; it leers over the shoulders of rich men among the merchants; it goes beckoning and babbling among the crowd; it always anticipates him in every place; and is always busiest, he knows, when he has gone away. When he is shut up in his room at night, it is in his house, outside it, audible in footsteps on the pavement, visible in print upon the table, steaming to and fro on railroads and in ships: restless and busy everywhere, with nothing else but him.

It is not a phantom of his imagination. It is as active in other people's minds as in his. Witness Cousin Feenix, who comes from Baden-Baden purposely to talk to him. Witness Major Bagstock, who accompanies Cousin Feenix on that friendly mission.

Mr. Dombey receives them with his usual dignity, and stands erect, in his old attitude, before the fire. He feels that the world is looking at him out of their eyes. That it is in the stare of the pictures. That Mr. Pitt, upon the bookcase, represents it. That there are eyes in its own map, hanging on the wall.

"An unusually cold spring," says Mr. Dombey—to deceive the world.

"Damme, sir," says the major in the warmth of friendship, "Joseph Bagstock is a bad hand at a counterfeit. If you want to hold your friends off, Dombey, and to give them the cold shoulder, J. B. is not the man for your purpose. Joe is rough and tough, sir; blunt, sir, blunt, is Joe. His Royal Highness the late Duke of York did me the honour to say, deservedly or undeservedly—never mind that—If there is a man in the service on whom I can depend for coming to the point, that man is Joe—Joe Bagstock."

Mr. Dombey intimates his acquiescence.

"Now, Dombey," says the major, "I am a man of the world. Our friend Feenix—if I may presume to——"

"Honoured, I am sure," says Cousin Feenix.

"—Is," proceeds the major with a wag of his head, "also a man of the world. Dombey, *you* are a man of the world. Now, when three men of the world meet together, and are friends—as I believe——" again appealing to Cousin Feenix.

"I am sure," says Cousin Feenix, "most friendly."

"—And are friends," resumes the major, "old Joe's opinion is (J. may be wrong), that the opinion of the world on any particular subject is very easily got at."

"Undoubtedly," says Cousin Feenix. "In point of fact, it's quite a self-evident sort of thing. I am extremely anxious, major, that my friend Dombey should hear me express my very great astonishment and regret that my lovely and accomplished relative, who was possessed of every qualification to make a man happy, should have so far forgotten what was due to—in point of fact, to the world—as to commit herself in such a very extraordinary manner. I have been in a devilish state of depression ever since; and said, indeed, to Long Saxby last night—man of six foot ten, with whom my friend Dombey is probably acquainted—that it had upset me in a confounded way, and made me bilious. It induces a man to reflect, this kind of fatal catastrophe," says Cousin Feenix, "that events do occur in quite a providential manner; for if my aunt had been living at the time, I think the effect upon a devilish lively woman like herself would have been prostration, and that she would have fallen, in point of fact, a victim."

"Now, Dombey——" says the major, resuming his discourse with great energy.

"I beg your pardon," interposes Cousin Feenix. "Allow me another word. My friend Dombey will permit me to say, that if any circumstance could have added to the most infernal state of pain in which I find myself on this occasion, it would be the natural amazement of the world at my lovely and accomplished relative (as I must still beg leave to call her) being supposed to have so committed herself with a person—man with white teeth, in point of fact—of very inferior station to her husband. But while I must, rather peremptorily, request my friend Dombey not to criminate my lovely and accomplished relative until her criminality is perfectly established, I beg to assure my friend Dombey that the family I represent, and which is now almost extinct (devilish sad reflection for a man), will interpose no obstacle in his way, and will be happy to assent to any honourable course of proceeding, with a view to the future, that he may point out. I trust my friend Dombey will give me credit for the intentions by which I am animated in this very melancholy affair, and—a—in point of fact, I am not aware that I need trouble my friend Dombey with any further observations."

Mr. Dombey bows, without raising his eyes, and is silent.

"Now, Dombey," says the major, "our friend Feenix having, with an amount of eloquence that old Joe B. has never heard surpassed—no, by the Lord, sir! never!"—says the major, very blue indeed, and grasping his cane in the middle—"stated the case as regards the lady, I shall presume upon our friendship, Dombey, to offer a word on another aspect of it. Sir," says the major with the horse's cough, "the world in these things has opinions, which must be satisfied."

"I know it," rejoins Mr. Dombey.

"Of course you know it, Dombey," says the major. "Damme, sir, I know you know it. A man of your calibre is not likely to be ignorant of it."

"I hope not," replies Mr. Dombey.

"Dombey," says the major, "you will guess the rest. I speak out—prematurely perhaps—because the Bagstock breed have always spoken out. Little, sir, have they ever got by doing it; but it's in the Bagstock blood. A shot is to be taken at this man. You have J. B. at your elbow. He claims the name of friend. God bless you!"

"Major," returns Mr. Dombey, "I am obliged. I shall put myself in your hands when the time comes. The time not being come, I have forbore to speak to you."

"Where is the fellow, Dombey?" inquires the major, after gasping and looking at him for a minute.

"I don't know."

"Any intelligence of him?" asks the major.

"Yes."

"Dombey, I am rejoiced to hear it," says the major. "I congratulate you."

"You will excuse—even you, major," replies Mr. Dombey, "my entering into any further detail at present. The intelligence is of a singular kind, and singularly obtained. It may turn out to be valueless; it may turn out to be true; I cannot say at present. My explanation must stop here."

Although this is but a dry reply to the major's purple enthusiasm, the major receives it graciously, and is delighted to think that the world has such a fair prospect of soon receiving its due. Cousin Feenix is then presented with his meed of acknowledgment by the husband of his lovely and accomplished relative, and Cousin Feenix and Major Bagstock retire, leaving that husband to the world again, and to ponder at leisure on their representation of its state of mind concerning his affairs, and on its just and reasonable expectations.

But who sits in the housekeeper's room shed-

ding tears, and talking to Mrs. Pipchin in a low tone, with uplifted hands? It is a lady with her face concealed in a very close black bonnet, which appears not to belong to her. It is Miss Tox, who has borrowed this disguise from her servant, and comes from Princess's Place, thus secretly, to revive her old acquaintance with Mrs. Pipchin, in order to get certain information of the state of Mr. Dombey.

"How does he bear it, my dear creature?" asks Miss Tox.

"Well," says Mrs. Pipchin in her snappish way, "he's pretty much as usual."

"Externally," suggests Miss Tox. "But what he feels within!"

Mrs. Pipchin's hard grey eye looks doubtful as she answers, in three distinct jerks, "Ah! Perhaps. I suppose so."

"To tell you my mind, Lucretia," says Mrs. Pipchin; she still calls Miss Tox Lucretia, on account of having made her first experiments in the child quelling line of business on that lady, when an unfortunate and weazen little girl of tender years; "to tell you my mind, Lucretia, I think it's a good riddance. I don't want any of your brazen faces here, myself!"

"Brazen indeed! Well may you say brazen, Mrs. Pipchin!" returns Miss Tox. "To leave him! Such a noble figure of a man!" and here Miss Tox is overcome.

"I don't know about noble, I'm sure," observes Mrs. Pipchin; irascibly rubbing her nose.

"But I know this—that when people meet with trials, they must bear 'em. Hoity-toity! I have had enough to bear myself, in my time! What a fuss there is! She's gone, and well got rid of. Nobody wants her back, I should think!"

This hint of the Peruvian mines causes Miss Tox to rise to go away; when Mrs. Pipchin rings the bell for Towlinson to show her out. Mr. Towlinson, not having seen Miss Tox for ages, grins, and hopes she's well; observing that he didn't know her at first in that bonnet.

"Pretty well, Towlinson, I thank you," says Miss Tox. "I beg you'll have the goodness, when you happen to see me here, not to mention it. My visits are merely to Mrs. Pipchin."

"Very good, miss," says Towlinson.

"Shocking circumstances occur, Towlinson," says Miss Tox.

"Very much so indeed, miss," rejoins Towlinson.

"I hope, Towlinson," says Miss Tox, who, in her instruction of the Toodle family, has acquired an admonitory tone, and a habit of improving passing occasions, "that what has

happened here will be a warning to you, Towlinson."

"Thank you, miss, I'm sure," says Towlinson. He appears to be falling into a consideration of the manner in which this warning ought to operate in his particular case, when the vinegary Mrs. Pipchin, suddenly stirring him up with a "What are you doing? Why don't you show the lady to the door?" he ushers Miss Tox forth. As she passes Mr. Dombey's room, she shrinks into the inmost depths of the black bonnet, and walks on tiptoe; and there is not another atom in the world which haunts him so, that feels such sorrow and solicitude about him as Miss Tox takes out under the black bonnet into the street, and tries to carry home shadowed from the newly-lighted lamps.

But Miss Tox is not a part of Mr. Dombey's world. She comes back every evening at dusk; adding clogs and an umbrella to the bonnet on wet nights; and bears the grins of Towlinson, and the huffs and rebuffs of Mrs. Pipchin, and all to ask how he does, and how he bears his misfortune: but she has nothing to do with Mr. Dombey's world. Exacting and harassing as ever, it goes on without her; and she, a by no means bright or particular star, moves in her little orbit in the corner of another system, and knows it quite well, and comes, and cries, and goes away, and is satisfied. Verily Miss Tox is easier of satisfaction than the world that troubles Mr. Dombey so much.

At the counting-house the clerks discuss the great disaster in all its lights and shades, but chiefly wonder who will get Mr. Carker's place. They are generally of opinion that it will be shorn of some of its emoluments, and made uncomfortable by newly-devised checks and restrictions; and those who are beyond all hope of it are quite sure they would rather not have it, and don't at all envy the person for whom it may prove to be reserved. Nothing like the prevailing sensation has existed in the counting-house since Mr. Dombey's little son died; but all such excitements there take a social, not to say jovial turn, and lead to the cultivation of good-fellowship. A reconciliation is established, on this propitious occasion, between the acknowledged wit of the counting-house and an aspiring rival, with whom he has been at deadly feud for months; and a little dinner being proposed, in commemoration of their happily-restored amity, takes place at a neighbouring tavern; the wit in the chair; the rival acting as Vice-President. The orations following the removal of the cloth are opened by the chair, who says, Gentlemen, he can't disguise from himself that this is not a

time for private dissensions. Recent occurrences, to which he need not more particularly allude, but which have not been altogether without notice in some Sunday papers, and in a daily paper which he need not name (here every other member of the company names it in an audible murmur), have caused him to reflect; and he feels that for him and Robinson to have any personal differences at such a moment would be for ever to deny that good feeling in the general cause, for which he has reason to think and hope that the gentlemen in Dombey's House have always been distinguished. Robinson replies to this like a man and a brother; and one gentleman who has been in the office three years, under continual notice to quit on account of lapses in his arithmetic, appears in a perfectly new light, suddenly bursting out with a thrilling speech, in which he says, May their respected chief never again know the desolation which has fallen on his hearth! and says a great variety of things, beginning with "May he never again," which are received with thunders of applause. In short, a most delightful evening is passed, only interrupted by a difference between two juniors, who, quarrelling about the probable amount of Mr. Carker's late receipts per annum, defy each other with decanters, and are taken out greatly excited. Soda water is in general request at the office next day, and most of the party deem the bill an imposition.

As to Perch, the messenger, he is in a fair way of being ruined for life. He finds himself again constantly in bars of public-houses, being treated and lying dreadfully. It appears that he met everybody concerned in the late transaction, everywhere, and said to them, "Sir," or "Madam," as the case was, "why do you look so pale?" at which each shuddered from head to foot, and said, "Oh, Perch!" and ran away. Either the consciousness of these enormities, or the reaction consequent on liquor, reduces Mr. Perch to an extreme state of low spirits at that hour of the evening when he usually seeks consolation in the society of Mrs. Perch at Balls Pond; and Mrs. Perch frets a good deal, for she fears his confidence in woman is shaken now, and that he half expects, on coming home at night, to find her gone off with some Viscount.


Mr. Dombey's servants are becoming, at the same time, quite dissipated, and unfit for other service. They have hot suppers every night, and "talk it over" with smoking drinks upon the board. Mr. Towlinson is always maudlin after half-past ten, and frequently begs to know whether he didn't say that no good would ever come of living in a corner house? They whisper about

Miss Florence, and wonder where she is; but agree that, if Mr. Dombey don't know, Mrs. Dombey does. This brings them to the latter, of whom cook says, She had a stately way, though, hadn't she? But she was too high. They all agree that she was too high, and Mr. Towlinson's old flame, the housemaid (who is very virtuous), entreats that you will never talk to her any more about people who holds their heads up, as if the ground wasn't good enough for 'em.

Everything that is said and done about it, except by Mr. Dombey, is done in chorus. Mr. Dombey and the world are alone together.

CHAPTER. LII.

SECRET INTELLIGENCE.

OOD Mrs. Brown and her daughter, Alice kept silent company together in their own dwelling. It was early in the evening, and late in the spring. But a few days had elapsed since Mr. Dombey had told Major Bagstock of his singular intelligence, singularly obtained, which might turn out to be valueless, and might turn out to be true; and the world was not satisfied yet.

The mother and daughter sat for a long time without interchanging a word: almost without motion. The old woman's face was shrewdly anxious and expectant; that of her daughter was expectant too, but in a less sharp degree, and sometimes it darkened, as if with gathering disappointment and incredulity. The old woman, without heeding these changes in its expression, though her eyes were often turned towards it, sat mumbling and munching, and listening confidently.

Their abode, though poor and miserable, was not so utterly wretched as in the days when only Good Mrs. Brown inhabited it. Some few attempts at cleanliness and order were manifest, though made in a reckless, gipsy way, that might have connected them, at a glance, with the younger woman. The shades of evening thickened and deepened as the two kept silence, until the blackened walls were nearly lost in the prevailing gloom.

Then Alice broke the silence which had lasted so long, and said:

"You may give him up, mother. He'll not come here."

"Death give him up!" returned the old woman impatiently. "He *will* come here."

"We shall see," said Alice.

"We shall see *him*," returned her mother.

"And doomsday," said the daughter.

"You think I'm in my second childhood, I know!" croaked the old woman. "That's the respect and duty that I get from my own gal, but I'm wiser than you take me for. He'll come. T'other day, when I touched his coat in the street, he looked round as if I was a toad. But Lord, to see him when I said their names, and asked him if he'd like to find out where they was!"

"Was it so angry?" asked her daughter, roused to interest in a moment.

"Angry! Ask if it was bloody. That's more like the word. Angry! Ha, ha! To call that only angry!" said the old woman, hobbling to the cupboard, and lighting a candle, which displayed the workings of her mouth to ugly advantage as she brought it to the table. "I might as well call your face only angry, when you think or talk about 'em."

It was something different from that, truly, as she sat as still as a crouched tigress, with her kindling eyes.

"Hark!" said the old woman triumphantly. "I hear a step coming. It's not the tread of any one that lives about here, or comes this way often. We don't walk like that. We should grow proud on such neighbours! Do you hear him?"

"I believe you are right, mother," replied Alice in a low voice. "Peace; open the door."

As she drew herself within her shawl, and gathered it about her, the old woman complied; and peering out, and beckoning, gave admission to Mr. Dombey, who stopped when he had set his foot within the door, and looked distrustfully around.

"It's a poor place for a great gentleman like your worship," said the old woman, curtsying and chattering. "I told you so, but there's no harm in it."

"Who is that?" asked Mr. Dombey, looking at her companion.

"That's my handsome daughter," said the old woman. "Your worship won't mind her. She knows all about it."

A shadow fell upon his face not less expressive than if he had groaned aloud, "Who does not know all about it?" but he looked at her steadily, and she, without any acknowledgment of his presence, looked at him. The shadow on his face was darker when he turned his glance away from her; and even then it wandered back again furtively, as if he were haunted by her bold eyes, and some remembrance they inspired.

"Woman," said Mr. Dombey to the old wretch, who was chuckling and leering close at his elbow, and who, when he turned to address her, pointed stealthily at her daughter, and rubbed her hands, and pointed again, "woman! I believe that I am weak and forgetful of my station in coming here, but you know why I come; and what you offered when you stopped me in the street the other day. What is it that you have to tell me concerning what I want to know; and how does it happen that I can find voluntary intelligence in a hovel like this," with a disdainful glance about him, "when I have exerted my power and means to obtain it in vain? I do not think," he said after a moment's pause, during which he had observed her sternly, "that you are so audacious as to mean to trifle with me, or endeavour to impose upon me. But, if you have that purpose, you had better stop on the threshold of your scheme. My humour is not a trifling one, and my acknowledgment will be severe."

"Oh, a proud, hard gentleman!" chuckled the old woman, shaking her head, and rubbing her shrivelled hands. "Oh, hard, hard! But your worship shall see with your own eyes, and hear with your own ears; not with ours—and if your worship's put upon their track, you won't mind paying something for it, will you. honourable deary?"

"Money," returned Mr. Dombey, apparently relieved and reassured by this inquiry, "will bring about unlikely things, I know. It may turn even means as unexpected and unpromising as these to account. Yes. For any reliable information I receive I will pay. But I must have the information first, and judge for myself of its value."

"Do you know nothing more powerful than money?" asked the younger woman, without rising, or altering her attitude.

"Nothere, I should imagine," said Mr. Dombey.

"You should know of something that is more powerful elsewhere, as I judge," she returned. "Do you know nothing of a woman's anger?"

"You have a saucy tongue, jade," said Mr. Dombey.

"Not usually," she answered, without any show of emotion. "I speak to you now, that you may understand us better, and rely more on us. A woman's anger is pretty much the same here as in your fine house. I am angry. I have been so many years. I have as good cause for my anger as you have for yours, and its object is the same man."

He started in spite of himself, and looked at her with astonishment.

"Yes," she said with a kind of laugh. "Wide as the distance may seem between us, it is so. How it is so is no matter; that is my story, and I keep my story to myself. I would bring you and him together, because I have a rage against him. My mother there is avaricious and poor; and she would sell any tidings she could glean, or anything, or anybody, for money. It is fair enough, perhaps, that you should pay her some, if she can help you to what you want to know. But that is not my motive. I have told you what mine is, and it would be as strong and all-sufficient with me if you haggled and bargained with her for a sixpence. I have done. My saucy tongue says no more, if you wait here till sunrise-to-morrow."

The old woman, who had shown great uneasiness during this speech, which had a tendency to depreciate her expected gains, pulled Mr. Dombey softly by the sleeve, and whispered to him not to mind her. He glanced at them both, by turns, with a haggard look, and said, in a deeper voice than was usual with him:

"Go on—what do you know?"

"Oh, not so fast, your worship: we must wait for some one," answered the old woman. "It's to be got from some one else—wormed out—screwed and twisted from him."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Patience," she croaked, laying her hand, like a claw, upon his arm. "Patience. I'll get at it. I know I can. If he was to hold it back from me," said Good Mrs. Brown, crooking her ten fingers, "I'd tear it out of him!"

Mr. Dombey followed her with his eyes as she hobbled to the door, and looked out again; and then his glance sought her daughter; but she remained impassive, silent, and regardless of him.

"Do you tell me, woman," he said, when the bent figure of Mrs. Brown came back, shaking its head and chattering to itself, "that there is another person expected here?"

"Yes!" said the old woman, looking up into his face, and nodding.

"From whom you are to extract the intelligence that is to be useful to me?"

"Yes," said the old woman, nodding again.

"A stranger?"

"Chut!" said the old woman with a shrill laugh. "What signifies? Well, well; no. No stranger to your worship. But he won't see you. He'd be afraid of you, and wouldn't talk. You'll stand behind that door, and judge him for yourself. We don't ask to be believed on trust. What! Your worship doubts the room behind the door? Oh the suspicion of you rich gentlefolks! Look at it, then."

Her sharp eye had detected an involuntary expression of this feeling on his part, which was not unreasonable under the circumstances. In satisfaction of it, she now took the candle to the door she spoke of. Mr. Dombey looked in; assured himself that it was an empty, crazy room; and signed to her to put the light back in its place.

"How long," he asked, "before this person comes?"

"Not long," she answered. "Would your worship sit down for a few odd minutes?"

He made no answer; but began pacing the room with an irresolute air, as if he were undecided whether to remain or depart, and as if he had some quarrel with himself for being there at all. But soon his tread grew slower and heavier, and his face more sternly thoughtful; as the object with which he had come fixed itself in his mind, and dilated there again.

While he thus walked up and down with his eyes on the ground, Mrs. Brown, in the chair from which she had risen to receive him, sat listening anew. The monotony of his step, or the uncertainty of age, made her so slow of hearing, that a footfall without had sounded in her daughter's ears for some moments, and she had looked up hastily to warn her mother of its approach, before the old woman was roused by it. But then she started from her seat, and whispering, "Here he is!" hurried her visitor to his place of observation, and put a bottle and glass upon the table, with such alacrity as to be ready to fling her arms round the neck of Rob the Grinder on his appearance at the door.

"And here's my bonny boy," cried Mrs. Brown, "at last!—oho, oho! You're like my own son, Robby!"

"Oh! Misses Brown!" remonstrated the Grinder. "Don't. Can't you be fond of a cove without squeedging and throttling of him? Take care of the bird-cage in my hand, will you?"

"Thinks of a bird-cage afore me!" cried the old woman, apostrophizing the ceiling. "Me that feels more than a mother for him!"

"Well, I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Misses Brown," said the unfortunate youth, greatly aggravated; "but you're so jealous of a cove. I'm very fond of you myself, and all that, of course; but I don't smother you, do I, Misses Brown?"

He looked and spoke as if he would have been far from objecting to do so, however, on a favourable occasion.

"And to talk about bird-cages, too!" whimpered the Grinder. "As if that was a crime!"

Why, lookee here. Do you know who this belongs to?"

"To master, dear?" said the old woman with a grin.

"Ah!" replied the Grinder, lifting a large cage, tied up in a wrapper, on the table, and untying it with his teeth and hands. "It's our parrot, this is."

"Mr. Carker's parrot, Rob?"

"Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?"

returned the goaded Grinder. "What do you go naming names for? I'm blest," said Rob,

pulling his hair with both hands in the exasperation of his feelings, "if she an't enough to make a cove run wild!"

"What! Do you snub me, thankless boy?" cried the old woman with ready vehemence.

"Good gracious, Misses Brown, no!" returned the Grinder, with tears in his eyes. "Was there ever such a—— Don't I dote upon you, Misses Brown?"

"Do you, sweet Rob? Do you truly, chickabiddy?" With that, Mrs. Brown held him in her fond embrace once more; and did not re-



"IT APPEARS THAT HE MET EVERYBODY CONCERNED IN THE LATE TRANSACTION, EVERYWHERE, AND SAID TO THEM, 'SIR,' OR 'MADAM,' AS THE CASE WAS, 'WHY DO YOU LOOK SO PALE?' AT WHICH EACH SHUDDERED FROM HEAD TO FOOT, AND SAID, 'OH, PERCH!' AND RAN AWAY."

lease him until he had made several violent and ineffectual struggles with his legs, and his hair was standing on end all over his head.

"Oh!" returned the Grinder, "what a thing it is to be perfectly pitched into with affection like this here! I wish she was—— How have you been, Misses Brown?"

"Ah! Not here since this night week!" said the old woman, contemplating him with a look of reproach.

"Good gracious, Misses Brown," returned the Grinder, "I said; to-night's a week, that I'd come

to-night, didn't I? And here I am. How you do go on! I wish you'd be a little rational, Misses Brown. I'm hoarse with saying things in my defence, and my very face is shiny with being hugged." He rubbed it hard with his sleeve, as if to remove the tender polish in question.

"Drink a little drop to comfort you, my Robin," said the old woman, filling the glass from the bottle, and giving it to him.

"Thankee, Misses Brown," returned the Grinder. "Here's your health. And long may

you—et cetera.” Which, to judge from the expression of his face, did not include any very choice blessings. “And here’s *her* health,” said the Grinder, glancing at Alice, who sat with her eyes fixed, as it seemed to him, on the wall behind him, but in reality on Mr. Dombey’s face at the door, “and wishing her the same, and many of ‘em !”

He drained the glass to these two sentiments, and set it down.

“Well, I say, Misses Brown !” he proceeded. “To go on a little rational now. You’re a judge of birds, and up to their ways, as I know to my cost.”

“Cost !” repeated Mrs. Brown.

“Satisfaction, I mean,” returned the Grinder. “How you do take up a cove, Misses Brown ! You’ve put it all out of my head again.”

“Judge of birds, Robby,” suggested the old woman.

“Ah !” said the Grinder. “Well, I’ve got to take care of this parrot—certain things being sold, and a certain establishment broke up—and as I don’t want no notice took at present, I wish you’d attend to her for a week or so, and give her board and lodging, will you ? If I *must* come backwards and forwards,” mused the Grinder with a dejected face, “I may as well have something to come for.”

“Something to come for !” screamed the old woman.

“Besides you, I mean, Misses Brown,” returned the craven Rob. “Not that I want any inducement but yourself, Misses Brown, I’m sure. Don’t begin again, for goodness’ sake.”

“He don’t care for me ! He don’t care for me as I care for him !” cried Mrs. Brown, lifting up her skinny hands. “But I’ll take care of his bird.”

“Take good care of it too, you know, Misses Brown,” said Rob, shaking his head. “If you was so much as to stroke its feathers once the wrong way, I believe it would be found out.”

“Ah ! so sharp as that, Rob ?” said Mrs. Brown quickly.

“Sharp, Misses Brown !” repeated Rob. “But this is not to be talked about.”

Checking himself abruptly, and not without a fearful glance across the room, Rob filled the glass again, and having slowly emptied it, shook his head, and began to draw his fingers across and across the wires of the parrot’s cage, by way of a diversion from the dangerous theme that had just been broached.

The old woman eyed him slyly, and hitching her chair nearer his, and looking in at the parrot,

who came down from the gilded dome at her call, said :

“Out of place now, Robby ?”

“Never *you* mind, Misses Brown,” returned the Grinder shortly.

“Board wages, perhaps, Rob ?” said Mrs. Brown.

“Pretty Polly !” said the Grinder.

The old woman darted a glance at him that might have warned him to consider his ears in danger, but it was his turn to look in at the parrot now, and, however expressive his imagination may have made her angry scowl, it was unseen by his bodily eyes.

“I wonder master didn’t take you with him, Rob,” said the old woman in a wheedling voice, but with increased malignity of aspect.

Rob was so absorbed in contemplation of the parrot, and in trolling his forefinger on the wires, that he made no answer.

The old woman had her clutch within a hair’s breadth of his shock of hair as it stooped over the table ; but she restrained her fingers, and said, in a voice that choked with its efforts to be coaxing :

“Robby, my child.”

“Well, Misses Brown,” returned the Grinder.

“I say, I wonder master didn’t take you with him, dear.”

“Never *you* mind, Misses Brown,” returned the Grinder.

Mrs. Brown instantly directed the clutch of her right hand at his hair, and the clutch of her left hand at his throat, and held on to the object of her fond affection with such extraordinary fury, that his face began to blacken in a moment.

“Misses Brown !” exclaimed the Grinder, “let go, will you ? What are you doing of ? Help, young woman : Misses Brown—Brown—

The young woman, however, equally unmoved by his direct appeal to her, and by his inarticulate utterance, remained quite neutral, until, after struggling with his assailant into a corner, Rob disengaged himself, and stood there panting and fenced in by his own elbows, while the old woman, panting too, and stamping with rage and eagerness, appeared to be collecting her energies for another swoop upon him. At this crisis Alice interposed her voice, but not in the Grinder’s favour, by saying,

“Well done, mother ! Tear him to pieces !”

“What, young woman !” blubbered Rob ; “are you against me too ? What have I been and done ? What am I to be tore to pieces for, I should like to know ? Why do you take and choke a cove who has never done you any harm, neither of you ? Call yourselves females, too !”

said the frightened and afflicted Grinder, with his coat-cuff at his eye. "I'm surprised at you! Where's your feminine tenderness?"

"You thankless dog!" gasped Mrs. Brown. "You impudent, insulting dog!"

"What have I been and done to go and give you offence, Misses Brown?" retorted the tearful Rob. "You was very much attached to me a minute ago."

"To cut me off with his short answers and his sulky words," said the old woman. "Me! because I happen to be curious to have a little bit of gossip about master and the lady, to dare to play at fast and loose with me! But I'll talk to you no more, my lad. Now go!"

"I am sure, Misses Brown," returned the abject Grinder, "I never insinuated that I wished to go. Don't talk like that, Misses Brown, if you please."

"I won't talk at all," said Mrs. Brown, with an action of her crooked fingers that made him shrink into half his natural compass in the corner. "Not another word with him shall pass my lips. He's an ungrateful hound. I cast him off. Now let him go! And I'll slip those after him that shall talk too much; that won't be shook away; that'll hang to him like leeches, and slink arter him like foxes. What! he knows 'em. He knows his old games and his old ways. If he's forgotten 'em, they'll soon remind him. Now let him go, and see how he'll do master's business, and keep master's secrets, with such company always following him up and down. Ha, ha, ha! He'll find 'em a different sort from you and me, Ally; close as he is with you and me. Now let him go, now let him go!"

The old woman, to the unspeakable dismay of the Grinder, walked her twisted figure round and round in a ring of some four feet in diameter, constantly repeating these words, and shaking her fist above her head, and working her mouth about.

"Misses Brown," pleaded Rob, coming a little out of his corner, "I'm sure you wouldn't injure a cove, on second thoughts, and in cold blood, would you?"

"Don't talk to me," said Mrs. Brown, still wrathfully pursuing her circle. "Now let him go, now let him go!"

"Misses Brown," urged the tormented Grinder, "I didn't mean to—oh, what a thing it is for a cove to get into such a line as this!—I was only careful of talking, Misses Brown, because I always am, on account of his being up to everything; but I might have known it wouldn't have gone any further. I'm sure I'm quite agreeable," with a wretched face, "for any little bit

of gossip, Misses Brown. Don't go on like this, if you please. Oh, couldn't you have the goodness to put in a word for a miserable cove here?" said the Grinder, appealing in desperation to the daughter.

"Come, mother, you hear what he says," she interposed in her stern voice, and with an impatient action of her head; "try him once more, and if you fall out with him again, ruin him, if you like, and have done with him."

Mrs. Brown, moved as it seemed by this very tender exhortation, presently began to howl; and softening by degrees, took the apologetic Grinder to her arms, who embraced her with a face of unutterable woe, and like a victim as he was, resumed his former seat, close by the side of his venerable friend; whom he suffered, not without much constrained sweetness of countenance, combating very expressive physiognomical revelations of an opposite character, to draw his arm through hers, and keep it there.

"And how's master, deary dear?" said Mrs. Brown, when, sitting in this amicable posture, they had pledged each other.

"Hush! If you'd be so good, Misses Brown, as to speak a little lower," Rob implored. "Why, he's pretty well, thankee, I suppose."

"You're not out of place, Robby?" said Mrs. Brown in a wheedling tone.

"Why, I'm not exactly out of place nor in," faltered Rob. "I—I'm still in pay, Misses Brown."

"And nothing to do, Rob?"

"Nothing particular to do just now, Misses Brown, but to—keep my eyes open," said the Grinder, rolling them in a forlorn way.

"Master abroad, Rob?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Misses Brown, couldn't you gossip with a cove about anything else?" cried the Grinder in a burst of despair.

The impetuous Mrs. Brown rising directly, the tortured Grinder detained her, stammering, "Ye-yes, Misses Brown, I believe he's abroad. What's she staring at?" he added, in allusion to the daughter, whose eyes were fixed upon the face that now again looked out behind him.

"Don't mind her, lad," said the old woman, holding him closer to prevent his turning round. "It's her way—her way. Tell me, Rob. Did you ever see the lady, deary?"

"Oh, Misses Brown, what lady?" cried the Grinder in a tone of piteous supplication.

"What lady?" she retorted. "The lady; Mrs. Dombey."

"Yes, I believe I see her once," replied Rob. "The night she went away; Robby, eh?" said

the old woman in his car, and taking note of every change in his face. "Aha! I know it was that night."

"Well, if you know it was that night, you know, Misses Brown," replied Rob, "it's no use putting pinchers into a cove to make him say so."

"Where did they go that night, Rob? Straight away? How did they go? Where did you see her? Did she laugh? Did she cry? Tell me all about it," cried the old hag, holding him closer yet, patting the hand that was drawn through his arm against her other hand, and searching every line in his face with her bleared eyes. "Come! Begin! I want to be told all about it. What, Rob, boy! You and me can keep a secret together, eh? We've done so before now. Where did they go first, Rob?"

The wretched Grinder made a gasp, and a pause.

"Are you dumb?" said the old woman angrily.

"Lord, Misses Brown; no! You expect a cove to be a flash of lightning. I wish I *was* the electric fluency," muttered the bewildered Grinder. "I'd have a shock at somebody, that would settle their business."

"What do you say?" asked the old woman with a grin.

"I'm wishing my love to you, Misses Brown," returned the false Rob, seeking consolation in the glass. "Where did they go to first, was it? Him and her do you mean?"

"Ah!" said the old woman eagerly. "Them two."

"Why, they didn't go nowhere—not together, I mean," answered Rob.

The old woman looked at him, as though she had a strong impulse upon her to make another clutch at his head and throat, but was restrained by a certain dogged mystery in his face.

"That was the art of it," said the reluctant Grinder; "that's the way nobody saw 'em go, or has been able to say how they did go." They went different ways, I tell you, Misses Brown."

"Ay; ay, ay! To meet at an appointed place," chuckled the old woman after a moment's silent and keen scrutiny of his face.

"Why, if they weren't a-going to meet somewhere, I suppose they might as well have stayed at home, mightn't they, Misses Brown?" returned the unwilling Grinder.

"Well, Rob? Well?" said the old woman, drawing his arm yet tighter through her own, as if, in her eagerness, she were afraid of his slipping away.

"What! haven't we talked enough yet, Misses

Brown?" returned the Grinder, who, between his sense of injury, his sense of liquor, and his sense of being on the rack, had become so lachrymose, that at almost every answer he scooped his coat-cuff into one or other of his eyes, and uttered an unavailing whine of remonstrance. "Did she laugh that night, was it? Didn't you ask if she laughed, Mrs. Brown?"

"Or cried?" added the old woman, nodding assent.

"Neither," said the Grinder. "She kept as steady when she and me—— Oh, I see you *will* have it out of me, Misses Brown! But take your solemn oath, now, that you'll never tell anybody."

This Mrs. Brown very readily did: being naturally Jesuitical; and having no other intention in the matter than that her concealed visitor should hear for himself.

"She kept as steady, then, when she and me went down to Southampton," said the Grinder, "as a image. In the morning she was just the same, Misses Brown. And when she went away in the packet before daylight, by herself—me pretending to be her servant, and seeing her safe aboard—she was just the same. *Now* are you contented, Misses Brown?"

"No, Rob. Not yet," answered Mrs. Brown decisively.

"Oh, here's a woman for you!" cried the unfortunate Rob, in an outburst of feeble lamentation over his own helplessness. "What did you wish to know next, Misses Brown?"

"What became of master? Where did he go?" she inquired, still holding him tight, and looking close into his face with her sharp eyes.

"Upon my soul, I don't know, Misses Brown," answered Rob. "Upon my soul, I don't know what he did, nor where he went, nor anything about him. I only know what he said to me, as a caution to hold my tongue, when we parted; and I tell you this, Misses Brown, as a friend, that sooner than ever repeat a word of what we're saying now, you had better take and shoot yourself, or shut yourself up in this house and set it afire, for there's nothing he wouldn't do, to be revenged upon you. You don't know him half as well as I do, Misses Brown. You're never safe from him, I tell you."

"Haven't I taken an oath," retorted the old woman, "and won't I keep it?"

"Well, I'm sure I hope you will, Misses Brown," returned Rob, somewhat doubtfully, and not without a latent threatening in his manner. "For your own sake, quite as much as mine."

He looked at her as he gave her this friendly

caution, and emphasized it with a nodding of his head; but finding it uncomfortable to encounter the yellow face with its grotesque action, and the ferret eyes with their keen old wintry gaze, so close to his own, he looked down uneasily, and sat shuffling in his chair, as if he were trying to bring himself to a sullen declaration that he would answer no more questions. The old woman, still holding him as before, took this opportunity of raising the forefinger of her right hand in the air, as a stealthy signal to the concealed observer to give particular attention to what was about to follow.

"Rob," she said in her most coaxing tone.

"Good gracious, Misses Brown, what's the matter now?" returned the exasperated Grinder.

"Rob! where did the lady and master appoint to meet?"

Rob shuffled more and more, and looked up and looked down, and bit his thumb, and dried it on his waistcoat, and finally said, eyeing his tormentor askant, "How should I know, Misses Brown?"

The old woman held up her finger again as before, and replying, "Come, lad! It's no use leading me to that, and there leaving me. I want to know," waited for his answer.

Rob, after a discomfited pause, suddenly broke out with, "How can I pronounce the names of foreign places, Misses Brown? What an unreasonable woman you are!"

"But you have heard it said, Robby," she retorted firmly, "and you know what it sounded like. Come!"

"I never heard it said, Misses Brown," returned the Grinder.

"Then," retorted the old woman quickly, "you have seen it written, and you can spell it."

Rob, with a petulant exclamation between laughing and crying—for he was penetrated with some admiration of Mrs. Brown's cunning, even through this persecution—after some reluctant fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, produced from it a little piece of chalk. The old woman's eyes sparkled when she saw it between his thumb and finger, and hastily clearing a space on the deal table, that he might write the word there, she once more made her signal with a shaking hand.

"Now, I tell you beforehand what it is, Misses-Brown," said Rob, "it's no use asking me anything else. I won't answer anything else; I can't. How long it was to be before they met, or whose plan it was that they was to go away alone, I don't know no more than you do. I don't know any more about it. If I was to tell you how I found out this word

you'd believe that, I shall I tell you, Misses Brown?"

"Yes, Rob."

"Well, then, Misses-Brown. The way—Now, you won't ask any more, you know?"—said Rob, turning his eyes, which were now fast getting drowsy and stupid, upon her.

"Not another word," said Mrs. Brown.

"Well, then, the way was this. When a certain person left the lady with me, he put a piece of paper with a direction written on it in the lady's hand, saying it was in case she should forget. She wasn't afraid of forgetting, for she tore it up as soon as his back was turned, and, when I put up the carriage steps, I shook out one of the pieces—she sprinkled the rest out of the window, I suppose, for there was none there afterwards, though I looked for 'em. There was only one word on it, and that was this, if you must and will know. But remember! You're upon your oath, Misses Brown!"

Mrs. Brown knew that, she said. Rob, having nothing more to say, began to chalk slowly and laboriously, on the table.

"D," the old woman read aloud, when he had formed the letter.

"Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?" he exclaimed, covering it with his hand, and turning impatiently upon her. "I won't have it read out. Be quiet, will you?"

"Then write large, Rob," she returned, repeating her secret signal; "for my eyes are not good even at print."

Muttering to himself, and returning to his work with an ill-will, Rob went on with the word. As he bent his head down, the person for whose information he so unconsciously laboured, moved from the door behind him to within a short stride of his shoulder, and looked eagerly towards the creeping track of his hand upon the table. At the same time, Alice, from her opposite chair, watched it narrowly as it shaped the letters, and repeated each one on her lips as he made it, without articulating it aloud. At the end of every letter her eyes and Mr. Dombey's met, as if each of them sought to be confirmed by the other: and thus they both spelt D. I. J. O. N.

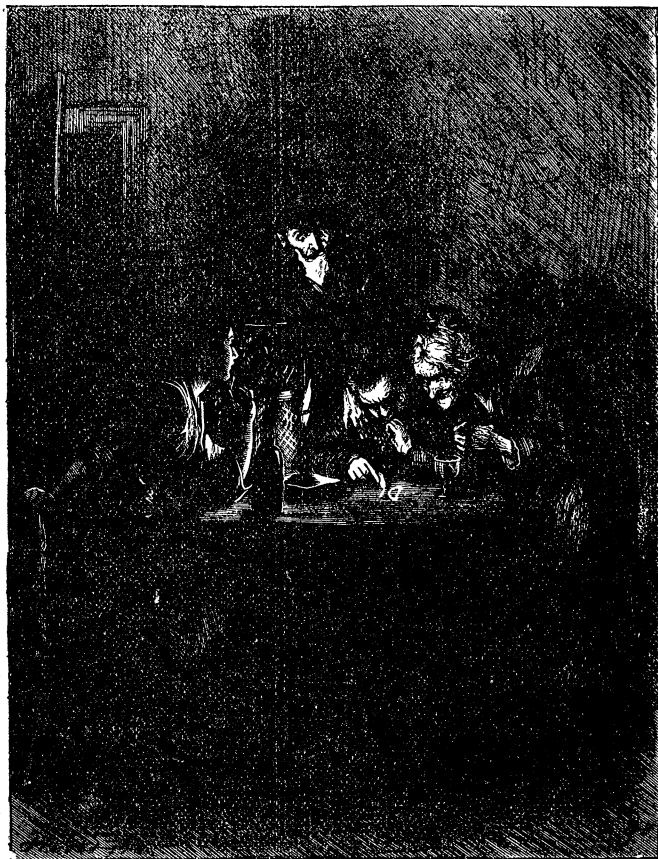
"There!" said the Grinder, moistening the palm of his hand hastily, to obliterate the word; and not content with smearing it out, rubbing and planing all trace of it away with his coat-sleeve, until the very colour of the chalk was gone from the table. "Now I hope you're contented, Misses Brown!"

The old woman, in token of her being so, released his arm and patted his back; and the

Grinder, overcome with mortification, cross-examination, and liquor, folded his arms on the table, laid his head upon them, and fell asleep.

Not until he had been heavily asleep some time, and was snoring roundly, did the old woman turn towards the door where Mr. Dom-

bey stood concealed, and beckon him to come through the room, and pass out. Even then she hovered over Rob, ready to blind him with her hands, or strike his head down, if he should raise it while the secret step was crossing to the door. But though her glance took sharp cog-



"D. I. J. O. N."

nizance of the sleeper, it was sharp too for the waking man; and when he touched her hand with his, and, in spite of all his caution, made a chinking, golden sound, it was as bright and greedy as a raven's.

The daughter's dark gaze followed him to the

door, and noted well how pale he was, and how his hurried tread indicated that the least delay was an insupportable restraint upon him, and how he was burning to be active and away. As he closed the door behind him, she looked round at her mother. The old woman trotted to her;

opened her hand to show what was within; and, tightly closing it again in her jealousy and avarice, whispered:

"What will he do, Ally?"

"Mischief," said the daughter.

"Murder?" asked the old woman.

"He's a madman in his wounded pride, and may do that, for anything we can say, or he either."

Her glance was brighter than her mother's, and the fire that shone in it was fiercer; but her face was colourless, even to her lips.

They said no more, but sat apart; the mother communing with her money; the daughter with her thoughts; the glance of each shining in the gloom of the feebly-lighted room. Rob slept and snored. The disregarded parrot only was in action. It twisted and pulled at the wires of its cage with its crooked beak, and crawled up to the dome, and along its roof like a fly, and down again head foremost, and shook, and bit, and rattled at every slender bar, as if it knew its master's danger, and was wild to force a passage out, and fly away to warn him of it.

CHAPTER LIII.

MORE INTELLIGENCE.

THERE were two of the traitor's own blood—his renounced brother and sister—on whom the weight of his guilt rested almost more heavily, at this time, than on the man whom he had so deeply injured. Prying and tormenting as the world was, it did Mr. Dombey the service of nerving him to pursuit and revenge. It roused his passion, stung his pride, twisted the one idea of his life into a new shape, and made some gratification of his wrath the object into which his whole intellectual existence resolved itself. All the stubbornness and implacability of his nature, all its hard impenetrable quality, all its gloom and moroseness, all its exaggerated sense of personal importance, all its jealous disposition to resent the least flaw in the ample recognition of his importance by others, set this way like many streams united into one, and bore him on upon their tide. The most impetuously passionate and violently impulsive of mankind would have been a milder enemy to encounter than the sullen Mr. Dombey wrought to this. A wild beast would have been easier turned or soothed

than the grave gentleman without a wrinkle in his starched cravat.

But the very intensity of his purpose became almost a substitute for action in it. While he was yet uninformed of the traitor's retreat, it served to divert his mind from his own calamity, and to entertain it with another prospect. The brother and sister of his false favourite had no such relief; everything in their history, past and present, gave his delinquency a more afflicting meaning to them.

The sister may have sometimes sadly thought that, if she had remained with him the companion and friend she had been once, he might have escaped the crime into which he had fallen. If she ever thought so, it was still without regret for what she had done, without the least doubt of her duty, without any pricing or enhancing of her self-devotion. But when this possibility presented itself to the erring and repentant brother, as it sometimes did, it smote upon his heart with such a keen, reproachful touch as he could hardly bear. No idea of retort upon his cruel brother came into his mind. New accusation of himself, fresh inward lamentings over his own unworthiness, and the ruin in which it was at once his consolation and his self-reproach that he did not stand alone, were the sole kind of reflections to which the discovery gave rise in him.

It was on the very same day whose evening set upon the last chapter, and when Mr. Dombey's world was busiest with the elopement of his wife, that the window of the room in which the brother and sister sat at their early breakfast was darkened by the unexpected shadow of a man coming to the little porch: which man was Perch the messenger.

"I've stepped over from Balls Pond at a early hour," said Mr. Perch, confidentially looking in at the room-door, and stopping on the mat to wipe his shoes all round, which had no mud upon them, "agreeable to my instructions last night. They was, to be sure and bring a note to you, Mr. Carker, before you went out in the morning. I should have been here a good hour and a half ago," said Mr. Perch meekly, "but for the state of health of Mrs. P., who I thought I should have lost in the night, I do assure you, five distinct times."

"Is your wife so ill?" asked Harriet.

"Why, you see," said Mr. Perch, first turning round to shut the door carefully, "she takes what has happened in our House so much to heart, miss. Her nerves is so very delicate, you see, and soon unstrung. Not but what the strongest nerves had good need to be shook, I'm sure. You feel it very much yourself, no doubts."

Harriet repressed a sigh, and glanced at her brother.

"I'm sure I feel it myself, in my humble way," Mr. Perch went on to say, with a shake of his head, "in a manner I couldn't have believed if I hadn't been called upon to undergo. It has almost the effect of drink upon me. I literally feels every morning as if I had been taking more than was good for me overnight."

Mr. Perch's appearance corroborated this recital of his symptoms. There was an air of feverish lassitude about it that seemed referable to drams; and which, in fact, might no doubt have been traced to those numerous discoveries of himself in the bars of public-houses, being treated and questioned, which he was in the daily habit of making.

"Therefore I can judge," said Mr. Perch, shaking his head again, and speaking in a silvery murmur, "of the feelings of such as is at all peculiarly situated in this most painful revelation."

Here Mr. Perch waited to be confided in; and receiving no confidence, coughed behind his hand. This leading to nothing, he coughed behind his hat; and that leading to nothing, he put his hat on the ground, and sought in his breast pocket for the letter.

"If I rightly recollect, there was no answer," said Mr. Perch with an affable smile; "but perhaps you'll be so good as cast your eye over it, sir."

John Carker broke the seal, which was Mr. Dombey's, and possessing himself of the contents, which were very brief, replied, "No. No answer is expected."

"Then I shall wish you good morning, miss," said Perch, taking a step toward the door, "and hoping, I'm sure, that you'll not permit yourself to be more reduced in mind than you can help by the late painful revelation. The Papers," said Mr. Perch, taking two steps back again, and comprehensively addressing both the brother and sister in a whisper of increased mystery, "is more eager for news of it than you'd suppose possible. One of the Sunday ones, in a blue cloak and white hat, that had previously offered for to bribe me—need I say with what success?—was dodging about our court last night as late as twenty minutes after eight o'clock. I see him myself, with his eye at the counting-house key-hole, which, being patent, is impervious. Another one," said Mr. Perch, "with military frogs, is in the parlour of the King's Arms all the blessed day. I happened, last week, to let a little observation fall there, and next morning, which was Sunday, I see it worked up in print, in a most surprising manner."

Mr. Perch resorted to his breast pocket, as if to produce the paragraph, but receiving no encouragement, pulled out his beaver gloves, picked up his hat, and took his leave; and, before it was high noon, Mr. Perch had related, to several select audiences at the King's Arms and elsewhere, how Miss Carker, bursting into tears, had caught him by both hands, and said, "Oh! dear, dear Perch, the sight of you is all the comfort I have left!" and how Mr. John Carker had said, in an awful voice, "Perch, I disown him. Never let me hear him mentioned as a brother more!"

"Dear John," said Harriet, when they were left alone, and had remained silent for some few moments, "there are bad tidings in that letter."

"Yes. But nothing unexpected," he replied. "I saw the writer yesterday."

"The writer?"

"Mr. Dombey. He passed twice through the counting-house while I was there. I had been able to avoid him before, but of course could not hope to do that long. I know how natural it was that he should regard my presence as something offensive; I felt it must be so myself."

"He did not say so?"

"No; he said nothing: but I saw that his glance rested on me for a moment, and I was prepared for what would happen—for what *has* happened. I am dismissed!"

She looked as little shocked and as hopeful as she could, but it was distressing news, for many reasons.

"I need not tell you," said John Carker, reading the letter, "'why your name would henceforth have an unnatural sound, in however remote a connection with mine, or why the daily sight of any one who bears it would be unendurable to me. I have to notify the cessation of all engagements between us, from this date, and to request that no renewal of any communication with me, or my establishment, be ever attempted by you.'—Enclosed is an equivalent in money to a generously long notice, and this is my discharge. Heaven knows, Harriet, it is a lenient and considerate one, when we remember all!"

"If it be lenient and considerate to punish you at all, John, for the misdeed of another," she replied gently, "yes."

"We have been an ill-omened race to him," said John Carker. "He has reason to shrink from the sound of our name, and to think that there is something cursed and wicked in our blood. I should almost think it too. Harriet, but for you."

"Brother, don't speak like this. If you have any special reason, as you say you have, and

think you have—though I say, No!—to love me, spare me the hearing of such wild, mad words!"

He covered his face with both his hands; but soon permitted her, coming near him, to take one in her own.

"After so many years, this parting is a melancholy thing, I know," said his sister, "and the cause of it is dreadful to us both. We have to live, too, and must look about us for the means. Well, well! We can do so undismayed. It is our pride, not our trouble, to strive, John, and to strive together."

A smile played on her lips as she kissed his cheek, and entreated him to be of good cheer.

"Oh, dearest sister! Tied, of your own noble will, to a ruined man! whose reputation is blighted; who has no friend himself, and has driven every friend of yours away!"

"John!" she laid her hand hastily upon his lips, "for my sake! In remembrance of our long companionship!" He was silent. "Now let me tell you, dear," quietly sitting by his side, "I have, as you have, expected this; and when I have been thinking of it, and fearing that it would happen, and preparing myself for it as well as I could, I have resolved to tell you, if it should be so, that I have kept a secret from you, and that we *have* a friend."

"What's our friend's name, Harriet?" he answered with a sorrowful smile.

"Indeed, I don't know, but he once made a very earnest protestation to me of his friendship and his wish to serve us: and to this day I believe him."

"Harriet!" exclaimed her wondering brother, "where does this friend live?"

"Neither do I know that," she returned.

"But he knows us both, and our history—all our little history, John. That is the reason why, at his own suggestion, I have kept the secret of his coming here from you, lest his acquaintance with it should distress you."

"Here!—Has he been here, Harriet?"

"Here, in this room. Once."

"What kind of man?"

"Not young. 'Grey-headed,' as he said, 'and fast growing greyer.' But generous, and frank, and good, I am sure."

"And only seen once, Harriet?"

"In this room only once," said his sister, with the slightest and most transient glow upon her cheek; "but, when here, he entreated me to suffer him to see me once a week as he passed by, in token of our being well, and continuing to need nothing at his hands. For I told him, when he proffered us any service he could render

—which was the object of his visit—that we needed nothing."

"And once a week——"

"Once every week since then, and always on the same day, and at the same hour, he has gone past; always on foot; always going in the same direction—towards London; and never pausing longer than to bow to me, and wave his hand cheerfully, as a kind guardian might. He made that promise when he proposed these curious interviews, and has kept it so faithfully and pleasantly, that if I ever felt any trifling uneasiness about them in the beginning (which I don't think I did, John; his manner was so plain and true), it very soon vanished, and left me quite glad when the day was coming. Last Monday—the first since this terrible event—he did not go by; and I have wondered whether his absence can have been in any way connected with what has happened."

"How?" inquired her brother.

"I don't know how. I have only speculated on the coincidence; I have not tried to account for it. I feel sure he will return. When he does, dear John, let me tell him that I have at last spoken to you, and let me bring you together. He will certainly help us to a new livelihood. His entreaty was that he might do something to smooth my life and yours; and I gave him my promise that, if we ever wanted a friend, I would remember him. Then, his name was to be no secret."

"Harriet," said her brother, who had listened with close attention, "describe this gentleman to me. I surely ought to know one who knows me so well."

His sister painted, as vividly as she could, the features, stature, and dress of her visitor; but John Carker, either from having no knowledge of the original, or from some fault in her description, or from some abstraction of his thoughts as he walked to and fro, pondering, could not recognise the portrait she presented to him.

However, it was agreed between them that he should see the original when he next appeared. This concluded, the sister applied herself, with a less anxious breast, to her domestic occupations, and the grey-haired man, late Junior of Dombey's, devoted the first day of his unwonted liberty to working in the garden.

It was quite late at night, and the brother was reading aloud while the sister plied her needle, when they were interrupted by a knocking at the door. In the atmosphere of vague anxiety and dread that lowered about them in connection with their fugitive brother, this sound, unusual there, became almost alarming. The

brother going to the door, the sister sat and listened timidly. Some one spoke to him, and he replied, and seemed surprised; and, after a few words, the two approached together.

"Harriet," said her brother, fighting in their late visitor, and speaking in a low voice, "Mr. Morfin—the gentleman so long in Dombey's House with James."

His sister started back as if a ghost had entered. In the doorway stood the unknown friend, with the dark hair sprinkled with grey, the ruddy face, the broad clear brow, and hazel eyes, whose secret she had kept so long!

"John!" she said, half breathless. "It is the gentleman I told you of to-day!"

"The gentleman, Miss Harriet," said the visitor, coming in—for he had stopped a moment in the doorway—"is greatly relieved to hear you say that: he has been devising ways and means, all the way here, of explaining himself, and has been satisfied with none. Mr. John, I am not quite a stranger here. You were stricken with astonishment when you saw me at your door just now. I observe you are more astonished at present. Well! That's reasonable enough under existing circumstances. If we were not such creatures of habit as we are, we shouldn't have reason to be astonished half so often."

By this time he had greeted Harriet with that agreeable mingling of cordiality and respect which she recollected so well, and had sat down near her, pulled off his gloves, and thrown them into his hat upon the table.

"There's nothing astonishing," he said, "in my having conceived a desire to see your sister, Mr. John, or in my having gratified it in my own way. As to the regularity of my visits since (which she may have mentioned to you), there is nothing extraordinary in that. They soon grew into a habit; and we are creatures of habit—creatures of habit!"

Putting his hands into his pockets, and leaning back in his chair, he looked at the brother and sister as if it were interesting to him to see them together; and went on to say, with a kind of irritable thoughtfulness: "It's this same habit that confirms some of us, who are capable of better things, in Lucifer's own pride and stubbornness—that confirms and deepens others of us in villainy—more of us in indifference—that hardens us from day to day, according to the temper of our clay, like images, and leaves us as susceptible as images to new impressions and convictions. You shall judge of its influence on me, John. For more years than I need name, I had my small, an exactly-defined share in the

management of Dombey's House, and saw your brother (who has proved himself a scoundrel! Your sister will forgive my being obliged to mention it) extending and extending his influence, until the business and its owner were his foot-ball; and saw you toiling at your obscure desk every day; and was quite content to be as little troubled as I might be, out of my own strip of duty, and to let everything about me go on, day by day, unquestioned, like a great machine—that was its habit and mine—and to take it all for granted, and consider it all right. My Wednesday nights came regularly round, our quartet parties came regularly off, my violoncello was in good tune, and there was nothing wrong in my world—or, if anything, not much—or, little or much, it was no affair of mine."

"I can answer for your being more respected and beloved during all that time than anybody in the house, sir," said John Carker.

"Pooh! Good-natured and easy enough, I dare say," returned the other; "a habit I had. It suited the manager: it suited the man he managed: it suited me best of all. I did what was allotted to me to do, made no court to either of them, and was glad to occupy a station in which none was required. So I should have gone on till now; but that my room had a thin wall. You can tell your sister that it was divided from the manager's room by a wainscot partition."

"They were adjoining rooms; had been one, perhaps, originally; and were separated as Mr. Morfin says," said her brother, looking back to him for the resumption of his explanation.

"I have whistled, hummed tunes, gone accurately through the whole of Beethoven's Sonata in B, to let him know that I was within hearing," said Mr. Morfin; "but he never heeded me. It happened seldom enough that I was within hearing of anything of a private nature, certainly. But when I was, and couldn't otherwise avoid knowing something of it, I walked out. I walked out once, John, during a conversation between two brothers, to which, in the beginning, young Walter Gay was a party. But I overheard some of it before I left the room. You remember it sufficiently, perhaps, to tell your sister what its nature was?"

"It referred, Harriet," said her brother in a low voice, "to the past, and to our relative positions in the house."

"Its matter was not new to me, but was presented in a new aspect. It shook me in my habit—the habit of nine-tenths of the world—of believing that all was right about me; because I was used to it," said their visitor; "and induced

me to recall the history of the two brothers, and to ponder on it. I think it was almost the first time in my life when I fell into this train of reflection—how will many things that are familiar, and quite matters of course to us now, look, when we come to see them from that new and distant point of view which we must all take up, one day or other? I was something less good-natured, as the phrase goes, after that morning, less easy and complacent altogether."

He sat for a minute or so, drumming with one hand on the table; and resumed in a hurry, as if he were anxious to get rid of his confession.

"Before I knew what to do, or whether I could do anything, there was a second conversation between these same two brothers, in which their sister was mentioned. I had no scruples of conscience in suffering all the waifs and strays of that conversation to float to me as freely as they would. I considered them mine by right. After that I came here to see the sister for myself. The first time I stopped at the garden-gate, I made a pretext of inquiring into the character of a poor neighbour; but I wandered out of that track, and I think Miss Harriet mistrusted me. The second time I asked leave to come in; came in; and said what I wished to say. Your sister showed me reasons, which I dared not dispute, for receiving no assistance from me then; but I established a means of communication between us, which remained unbroken until within these few days, when I was prevented, by important matters that have lately devolved upon me, from maintaining them."

"How little I have suspected this," said John Carker, "when I have seen you every day, sir! If Harriet could have guessed your name——"

"Why, to tell you the truth, John," interposed the visitor, "I kept it to myself for two reasons. I don't know that the first might have been binding alone; but one has no business to take credit for good intentions, and I made up my mind, at all events, not to disclose myself until I should be able to do you some real service or other. My second reason was, that I always hoped there might be some lingering possibility of your brother's relenting towards you both; and, in that case, I felt that where there was the chance of a man of his suspicious, watchful character discovering that you had been secretly befriended by me, there was the chance of a new and fatal cause of division. I resolved, to be sure, at the risk of turning his displeasure against myself—which would have been no matter—to watch my opportunity of serving you with the head of the House; but the distractions of death, courtship, marriage, and domestic un-

happiness have left us no head but your brother for this long, long time. And it would have been better for us," said the visitor, dropping his voice, "to have been a lifeless trunk."

He seemed conscious that these latter words had escaped him against his will, and stretching out a hand to the brother, and a hand to the sister, continued:

"All I could desire to say, and more, I have now said. All I mean goes beyond words, as I hope you understand and believe. The time has come, John—though most unfortunately and unhappily come—when I may help you without interfering with that redeeming struggle, which has lasted through so many years; since you were discharged from it to-day by no act of your own. It is late; I need say no more to-night. You will guard the treasure you have here, without advice or reminder from me."

With these words he rose to go.

"But go you first, John," he said good-humouredly, "with a light, without saying what you want to say, whatever that may be;" John Carker's heart was full, and he would have relieved it in speech, if he could; "and let me have a word with your sister. We have talked alone before, and in this room too; though it looks more natural with you here."

Following him out with his eyes, he turned kindly to Harriet, and said in a lower voice, and with an altered and graver manner:

"You wish to ask me something of the man whose sister it is your misfortune to be."

"I dread to ask," said Harriet.

"You have looked so earnestly at me more than once," rejoined the visitor, "that I think I can divine your question. Has he taken money? Is it that?"

"Yes."

"He has not."

"I thank Heaven!" said Harriet. "For the sake of John."

"That he has abused his trust in many ways," said Mr. Morfin; "that he has oftener dealt and speculated to advantage for himself than for the House he represented; that he has led the House on to prodigious ventures, often resulting in enormous losses; that he has always pampered the vanity and ambition of his employer, when it was his duty to have held them in check, and shown, as it was in his power to do, to what they tended here or there; will not, perhaps, surprise you now. Undertakings have been entered on, to swell the reputation of the House for vast resources, and to exhibit it in magnificent contrast to other merchants' houses, of which it requires a steady head to contemplate the possibly

—a few disastrous changes of affairs might render them the probably—ruinous consequences. In the midst of the many transactions of the House, in most parts of the world : a great labyrinth, of which only he has held the clue : he has had the opportunity, and he seems to have used it, of keeping the various results afloat, when ascertained; and substituting estimates and generalities for facts. But latterly—you follow me, Miss Harriet ?”

“Perfectly, perfectly,” she answered, with her frightened face fixed on his. “Pray tell me all the worst at once.”

“Latterly, he appears to have devoted the greatest pains to making these results so plain and clear, that reference to the private books enables one to grasp them, numerous and varying as they are, with extraordinary ease. As if he had resolved to show his employer at one broad view what has been brought upon him by ministration to his ruling passion ! That it has been his constant practice to minister to that passion basely, and to flatter it corruptly, is indubitable. In that, his criminality, as it is connected with the affairs of the House, chiefly consists.”

“One other word before you leave me, dear sir,” said Harriet. “There is no danger in all this ?”

“How danger ?” he returned with a little hesitation.

“To the credit of the House ?”

“I cannot help answering you plainly, and trusting you completely,” said Mr. Morfin after a moment’s survey of her face.

“You may. Indeed you may !”

“I am sure I may. Danger to the House’s credit ? No ; none. There may be difficulty, greater or less difficulty, but no danger, unless—unless, indeed—the head of the House, unable to bring his mind to the reduction of its enterprises, and positively refusing to believe that it is, or can be, in any position but the position in which he has always represented it to himself, should urge it beyond its strength. Then it would totter.”

“But there is no apprehension of that ?” said Harriet.

“There shall be no half-confidence,” he replied, shaking her hand, “between us. Mr. Dombey is unapproachable by any one, and his state of mind is haughty, rash, unreasonable, and ungovernable now. But he is disturbed and agitated now beyond all common bounds, and it may pass. You now know all, both worst and best. No more to-night, and good night !”

With that he kissed her hand, and passing

out to the door where her brother stood awaiting his coming, put him cheerfully aside when he essayed to speak ; told him that, as they would see each other soon and often, he might speak at another time, if he would, but there was no leisure for it then ; and went away at a round pace, in order that no word of gratitude might follow him.

The brother and sister sat conversing by the fireside until it was almost day ; made sleepless by this glimpse of the new world that opened before them, and feeling like two people shipwrecked long ago upon a solitary coast, to whom a ship had come at last, when they were old in resignation, and had lost all thought of any other home. But another and different kind of disquietude kept them waking too. The darkness out of which this light had broken on them gathered around ; and the shadow of their guilty brother was in the house where his foot had never trod.

Nor was it to be driven out, nor did it fade before the sun. Next morning it was there ; at noon ; at night. Darkest and most distinct at night, as is now to be told.

John Carker had gone out, in pursuance of a letter of appointment from their friend, and Harriet was left in the house alone. She had been alone some hours. A dull, grave evening, and a deepening twilight, were not favourable to the removal of the oppression on her spirits. The idea of this brother, long unseen and unknown, flitted about her in frightful shapes. He was dead, dying, calling to her, staring at her, frowning on her. The pictures in her mind were so obtrusive and exact that, as the twilight deepened, she dreaded to raise her head and look at the dark corners of the room, lest his wraith, the offspring of her excited imagination, should be waiting there to startle her. Once she had such a fancy of his being in the next room, hiding—though she knew quite well what a distempered fancy it was, and had no belief in it—that she forced herself to go there, for her own conviction. But in vain. The room resumed its shadowy terrors the moment she left it ; and she had no more power to divest herself of these vague impressions of dread than if they had been stone giants, rooted in the solid earth.

It was almost dark, and she was sitting near the window, with her head upon her hand, looking down, when, sensible of a sudden increase in the gloom of the apartment, she raised her eyes and uttered an involuntary cry. Close to the glass, a pale, scared face gazed in ; vacantly for an instant, as searching for an object ; then the eyes rested on herself, and lighted up.

"Let me in! Let me in! I want to speak to you!" and the hand rattled on the glass.

She recognised immediately the woman with the long dark hair, to whom she had given warmth, food, and shelter one wet night. Naturally afraid of her, remembering her violent behaviour, Harriet, retreating a little from the window, stood undecided and alarmed.

"Let me in! Let me speak to you! I am thankful—quiet—humble—anything you like. But let me speak to you."

The vehement manner of the entreaty, the earnest expression of the face, the trembling of the two hands that were raised imploringly, a certain dread and terror in the voice akin to her own condition at the moment, prevailed with Harriet. She hastened to the door and opened it.

"May I come in, or shall I speak here?" said the woman, catching at her hand.

"What is it that you want? What is it that you have to say?"

"Not much, but let me say it out, or I shall never say it. I am tempted now to go away. There seem to be hands dragging me from the door. Let me come in, if you can trust me for this once!"

Her energy again prevailed, and they passed into the fire-light of the little kitchen, where she had before sat, and ate, and dried her clothes.

"Sit there," said Alice, kneeling down beside her, "and look at me. You remember me?"

"I do."

"You remember what I told you I had been, and where I came from, ragged and lame, with the fierce wind and weather beating on my head?"

"Yes."

"You know how I came back that night, and threw your money in the dirt, and cursed you and your race. Now, see me here, upon my knees. Am I less earnest now than I was then?"

"If what you ask," said Harriet gently, "is forgiveness—"

"But it's not!" returned the other with a proud, fierce look. "What I ask is to be believed. Now you shall judge if I am worthy of belief, both as I was, and as I am."

Still upon her knees, and with her eyes upon the fire, and the fire shining on her ruined beauty and her wild black hair, one long tress of which she pulled over her shoulder, and wound about her hand, and thoughtfully bit, and tore while speaking, she went on:

"When I was young and pretty, and this," plucking contemptuously at the hair she held, "was only handled delicately, and couldn't be admired enough, my mother, who had not been

very mindful of me as a child, found out my merits and was fond of me, and proud of me. She was covetous and poor, and thought to make a sort of property of me. No great lady ever thought that of a daughter yet, I'm sure, or acted as if she did—it's never done, we all know—and that shows that the only instances of mothers bringing up their daughters wrong, and evil coming of it, are among such miserable folks as us."

Looking at the fire, as if she were forgetful, for the moment, of having any auditor, she continued in a dreamy way, as she wound the long tress of hair tight round and round her hand.

"What came of that I needn't say. Wretched marriages don't come of such things, in our degree; only wretchedness and ruin. Wretchedness and ruin came on me—came on me."

Raising her eyes swiftly from their moody gaze upon the fire to Harriet's face, she said—

"I am wasting time, and there is none to spare; yet, if I hadn't thought of all, I shouldn't be here now: Wretchedness and ruin came on me, I say. I was made a short-lived toy, and flung aside more cruelly and carelessly than even such things are. By whose hand do you think?"

"Why do you ask me?" said Harriet.

"Why do you tremble?" rejoined Alice with an eager look. "His usage made a Devil of me. I sunk in wretchedness and ruin, lower and lower yet. I was concerned in a robbery—in every part of it but the gains—and was found out, and sent to be tried, without a friend, without a penny. Though I was but a girl, I would have gone to Death sooner than ask him for a word, if a word of his could have saved me. I would! To any death that could have been invented. But my mother, covetous always, sent to him in my name, told the true story of my case, and humbly prayed and petitioned for a small last gift—for not so many pounds as I have fingers on this hand. Who was it, do you think, who snapped his fingers at me in my misery, lying, as he believed, at his feet, and left me without even this poor sign of remembrance; well satisfied that I should be sent abroad, beyond the reach of further trouble to him, and should die, and rot there? Who was this, do you think?"

"Why do you ask me?" repeated Harriet.

"Why do you tremble," said Alice, laying her hand upon her arm, and looking in her face, "but that the answer is on your lips? It was your brother James."

Harriet trembled more and more, but did not avert her eyes from the eager look that rested on them.

"When I knew you were his sister—which was on that night—I came back, weary and lame, to spurn your gift. I felt that night as if I could have travelled, weary and lame, over the whole world, to stab him, if I could have found him in a lonely place with no one near.

Do you believe that I was in earnest in all that?"

"I do! Good Heaven, why are you come again?"

"Since then," said Alice, with the same grasp of her arm, and the same look in her face, "I



"STILL UPON HER KNEES, AND WITH HER EYES UPON THE FIRE."

have seen him! I have followed him with my eyes, in the broad day. If any spark of my resentment slumbered in my bosom, it sprung into a blaze when my eyes rested on him. You know he has wronged a proud man, and made him his deadly enemy. What if I had given information of him to that man?"

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"Information!" repeated Harriet.

"What if I had found out one who knew your brother's secret: who knew the manner of his flight; who knew where he and the companion of his flight were gone? What if I had made him utter all his knowledge, word by word, before this enemy, concealed to hear it? What if

I had sat by at the time, looking into this enemy's face, and seeing it change till it was scarcely human? What if I had seen him rush away, mad, in pursuit? What if I knew, now, that he was on his road, more fiend than man, and must, in so many hours, come up with him?"

"Remove your hand!" said Harriet, recoiling. "Go away! Your touch is dreadful to me!"

"I have done this," pursued the other, with her eager look, regardless of the interruption. "Do I speak and look as if I really had? Do you believe what I am saying?"

"I fear I must, Let my arm go!"

"Not yet. A moment more. You can think what my revengeful purpose must have been, to last so long, and urge me to do this?"

"Dreadful!" said Harriet.

"Then, when you see me now," said Alice hoarsely, "here again, kneeling quietly on the ground, with my touch upon your arm, with my eyes upon your face, you may believe that there is no common earnestness in what I say, and that no common struggle has been battling in my breast. I am ashamed to speak the words, but I relent. I despise myself; I have fought with myself all day, and all last night; but I relent towards him without reason, and wish to repair what I have done, if it is possible. I wouldn't have them come together while his pursuer is so blind and headlong. If you had seen him as he went out last night, you would know the danger better."

"How shall it be prevented? What can I do?" cried Harriet.

"All night long," pursued the other hurriedly, "I had dreams of him—and yet I didn't sleep—in his blood. All day I have had him near me."

"What can I do?" said Harriet, shuddering at these words.

"If there is any one who'll write, or send, or go to him, let them lose no time. He is at Dijon. Do you know the name, and where it is?"

"Yes!"

"Warn him that the man he has made his enemy is in a frenzy, and that he doesn't know him if he makes light of his approach. Tell him that he is on the road—I know he is!—and hurrying on. Urge him to get away while there is time—if there *is* time—and not to meet him yet. A month or so will make years of difference. Let them not encounter through me. Anywhere but there! Any time but now! Let his foe follow him, and find him for himself, but not through me! There is enough upon my head without."

The fire ceased to be reflected in her jet-black hair, uplifted face, and eager eyes; her hand was gone from Harriet's arm; and the place where she had been was empty.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE FUGITIVES.

THE time, an hour short of midnight; the place, a French Apartment, comprising some half-dozen rooms;—a dull, cold hall or corridor, a dining-room, a drawing-room, a bed-chamber, and an inner drawing-room, or boudoir, smaller and more retired than the rest. All these shut in by one large pair of doors on the main staircase, but each room provided with two or three pairs of doors of its own, establishing several means of communication with the remaining portion of the apartment, or with certain small passages within the wall, leading, as is not unusual in such houses, to some back-stairs with an obscure outlet below. The whole situated on the first floor of so large an hotel, that it did not absorb one entire row of windows upon one side of the square courtyard in the centre, upon which the whole four sides of the mansion looked.

An air of splendour, sufficiently faded to be melancholy, and sufficiently dazzling to clog and embarrass the details of life with a show of state, reigned in these rooms. The walls and ceilings were gilded and painted; the floors were waxed and polished; crimson drapery hung in festoons from window, door, and mirror; and candelabra, gnarled and intertwined like the branches of trees, or horns of animals, stuck out from the panels of the wall. But in the daytime, when the lattice blinds (now closely shut) were opened, and the light let in, traces were discernible, among this finery, of wear and tear and dust, of sun and damp and smoke, and lengthened intervals of want of use and habitation, when such shows and toys of life seem sensitive like life, and waste as men shut up in prison do. Even night, and clusters of burning candles, could not wholly efface them, though the general glitter threw them in the shade.

The glitter of bright tapers, and their reflection in looking-glasses, scraps of gilding, and gay colours, were confined, on this night, to one room—that smaller room within the rest, just now enumerated. Seen from the hall, where a lamp was feebly burning, through the dark per-

spective of open doors, it looked as shining and precious as a gem. In the heart of its radiance sat a beautiful woman—Edith.

She was alone. The same defiant, scornful woman still. The cheek a little worn, the eye a little larger in appearance, and more lustrous, but the haughty bearing just the same. No shame upon her brow; no late repentance bending her disdainful neck. Imperious and stately yet, and yet regardless of herself and of all else, she sat with her dark eyes cast down, waiting for some one.

No book, no work, no occupation of any kind but her own thoughts, beguiled the tardy time. Some purpose, strong enough to fill up any pause, possessed her. With her lips pressed together, and quivering if for a moment she released them from her control; with her nostril inflated; her hands clasped in one another; and her purpose swelling in her breast; she sat, and waited.

At the sound of a key in the outer door, and a footstep in the hall, she started up and cried "Who's that?" The answer was in French, and two men came in with jingling trays, to make preparation for supper.

"Who had bade them do so?" she asked.

"Monsieur had commanded it, when it was his pleasure to take the apartment. Monsieur had said, when he stayed there for an hour, *en route*, and left the letter for madame—Madame had received it surely?"

"Yes."

"A thousand pardons! The sudden apprehension that it might have been forgotten had struck him:" a bald man, with a large beard, from a neighbouring restaurant: "with despair! Monsieur had said that supper was to be ready at that hour: also that he had forewarned madame of the commands he had given in his letter. Monsieur had done the Golden Head the honour to request that the supper should be choice and delicate. Monsieur would find that his confidence in the Golden Head was not misplaced."

Edith said no more, but looked on thoughtfully while they prepared the table for two persons, and set the wine upon it. She arose before they had finished, and taking a lamp, passed into the bedchamber, and into the drawing-room, where she hurriedly but narrowly examined all the doors; particularly one in the former room that opened on the passage in the wall. From this she took the key, and put it on the outer side. She then came back.

The men—the second of whom was a dark, bilious subject, in a jacket, close shaved, and with a black head of hair close cropped—had completed their preparation of the table, and

were standing looking at it. He who had spoken before, inquired whether madame thought it would be long before monsieur arrived?

She couldn't say. It was all one.

"Pardon! There was the supper! It should be eaten on the instant. Monsieur (who spoke French like an Angel—or a Frenchman—it was all the same) had spoken with great emphasis of his punctuality. But the English nation had so grand a genius for punctuality. Ah! what noise! Great Heaven, here was monsieur! Behold him!"

In effect, monsieur, admitted by the other of the two, came, with his gleaming teeth, through the dark rooms, like a mouth; and arriving in that sanctuary of light and colour, a figure at full length, embraced madame, and addressed her in the French tongue as his charming wife.

"My God! Madame is going to faint. Madame is overcome with joy!" The bald man with the beard observed it, and cried out.

Madame had only shrunk and shivered. Before the words were spoken, she was standing with her hand upon the velvet back of a great chair; her figure drawn up to its full height, and her face immovable.

"François has flown over to the Golden Head for supper. He flies on these occasions like an angel or a bird. The baggage of monsieur is in his room. All is arranged. The supper will be here this moment." These facts the bald man notified with bows and smiles, and presently the supper came.

The hot dishes were on a chafing-dish; the cold already set forth, with the change of service on a sideboard. Monsieur was satisfied with this arrangement. The supper-table being small, it pleased him very well. Let them set the chafing-dish upon the floor, and go. He would remove the dishes with his own hands.

"Pardon!" said the bald man politely. "It was impossible!"

Monsieur was of another opinion. He required no further attendance that night.

"But madame——" the bald man hinted.

"Madame," replied monsieur, "had her own maid. It was enough."

"A million pardons! No! madame had no maid!"

"I came here alone," said Edith. "It was my choice to do so. I am well used to travelling; I want no attendance. They need send nobody to me."

Monsieur accordingly, persevering in his first proposed impossibility, proceeded to follow the two attendants to the outer door, and secure it after them for the night. The bald man turning

round to bow as he went out, observed that madame still stood with her hand upon the velvet back of the great chair, and that her face was quite regardless of him, though she was looking straight before her.

As the sound of Carker's fastening the door resounded through the intermediate rooms, and seemed to come hushed and stifled into that last distant one, the sound of the Cathedral clock striking twelve mingled with it in Edith's ears. She heard him pause, as if he heard it too, and listened; and then come back towards her, laying a long train of footsteps through the silence, and shutting all the doors behind him as he came along. Her hand, for a moment, left the velvet chair to bring a knife within her reach upon the table; then she stood as she had stood before.

"How strange to come here by yourself, my love!" he said as he entered.

"What!" she returned.

Her tone was so harsh; the quick turn of her head so fierce; her attitude so repellent; and her frown so black; that he stood with the lamp in his hand, looking at her, as if she had struck him motionless.

"I say," he at length repeated, putting down the lamp, and smiling his most courtly smile, "how strange to come here alone! It was unnecessary caution surely, and might have defeated itself. You were to have engaged an attendant at Havre or Rouen, and have had abundance of time for the purpose, though you had been the most capricious and difficult (as you are the most beautiful, my love) of women."

Her eyes gleamed strangely at him, but she stood with her hand resting on the chair, and said not a word.

"I have never," resumed Carker, "seen you look so handsome as you do to-night. Even the picture I have carried in my mind during this cruel probation, and which I have contemplated night and day, is exceeded by the reality."

Not a word. Not a look. Her eyes completely hidden by their drooping lashes, but her head held up.

"Hard, unrelenting terms they were!" said Carker with a smile, "but they are all fulfilled and past, and make the present more delicious and more safe. Sicily shall be the place of our retreat. In the idlest and easiest part of the world, my soul, we'll both seek compensation for old slavery."

He was coming gaily towards her, when, in an instant, she caught the knife up from the table, and started one pace back.

"Stand still!" she said, "or I shall murder you!"

The sudden change in her, the towering fury and intense abhorrence sparkling in her eyes and lighting up her brow, made him stop as if a fire had stopped him.

"Stand still!" she said, "come no nearer me, upon your life!"

They both stood looking at each other. Rage and astonishment were in his face, but he controlled them, and said lightly,

"Come, come! Tush, we are alone, and out of everybody's sight and hearing. Do you think to frighten me with these tricks of virtue?"

"Do you think to frighten me," she answered fiercely, "from any purpose that I have, and any course I am resolved upon, by reminding me of the solitude of this place, and there being no help near? Me, who am here alone designedly? If I feared you, should I not have avoided you? If I feared you, should I be here, in the dead of night, telling you to your face what I am going to tell?"

"And what is that," he said, "you handsome shrew? Handsomer so than any other woman in her best humour."

"I tell you nothing," she returned, "until you go back to that chair—except this, once again—Don't come near me! Not a step nearer. I tell you, if you do, as Heaven sees us, I shall murder you!"

"Do you mistake me for your husband?" he retorted with a grin.

Disdaining to reply, she stretched her arm out, pointing to the chair. He bit his lip, frowned, laughed, and sat down in it, with a baffled, irresolute, impatient air, he was unable to conceal; and biting his nail nervously, and looking at her sideways, with bitter discomfiture, even while he feigned to be amused by her caprice.

She put the knife down upon the table, and touching her bosom with her hand, said:

"I have something lying here that is no love trinket; and sooner than endure your touch once more, I would use it on you—and you know it, while I speak—with less reluctance than I would on any other creeping thing that lives."

He affected to laugh jestingly, and entreated her to act her play out quickly, for the supper was growing cold. But the secret look with which he regarded her was more sullen and lowering, and he struck his foot once upon the floor with a muttered oath.

"How many times," said Edith, bending her darkest glance upon him, "has your bold knavery assailed me with outrage and insult?"

How many times in your smooth manner, and mocking words and looks, have I been twitted with my courtship and my marriage? How many times have you laid bare my wound of love for that sweet, injured girl, and lacerated it? How often have you fanned the fire on which, for two years, I have writhed; and tempted me to take a desperate revenge, when it has most tortured me?"

"I have no doubt, ma'am," he replied, "that you have kept a good account, and that it's pretty accurate. Come, Edith. To your husband, poor wretch, this was well enough—"

"Why, if," she said, surveying him with a haughty contempt and disgust that he shrunk under, let him brave it as he would, "if all my other reasons for despising him could have been blown away like feathers, his having you for his counsellor and favourite would have almost been enough to hold their place."

"Is that a reason why you have run away with me?" he asked her tauntingly.

"Yes, and why we are face to face for the last time. Wretch! we meet to-night, and part to-night. For not one moment after I have ceased to speak will I stay here!"

He turned upon her with his ugliest look, and gripped the table with his hand; but neither rose, nor otherwise answered or threatened her.

"I am a woman," she said, confronting him steadfastly, "who from her very childhood has been shamed and steeled. I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. I have not had an accomplishment or grace that might have been a resource to me, but it has been paraded, and vended to enhance my value, as if the common crier had called it through the streets. My poor, proud friends have looked on and approved; and every tie between us has been deadened in my breast. There is not one of them for whom I care, as I could care for a pet dog. I stand alone in the world, remembering well what a hollow world it has been to me, and what a hollow part of it I have been myself. You know his, and you know that my fame with it is worthless to me."

"Yes; I imagined that," he said.

"And calculated on it," she rejoined, "and so pursued me. Grown too indifferent for any opposition but indifference to the daily working of the hands that had moulded me to this; and knowing that my marriage would at least prevent their hawking of me up and down; I suffered myself to be sold as infamously as any woman with a halter round her neck is sold in any market-place. You know that,"

"Yes," he said, showing all his teeth. "I know that."

"And calculated on it," she rejoined once more, "and so pursued me. From my marriage-day, I found myself exposed to such new shame—to such solicitation and pursuit (expressed as clearly as if it had been written in the coarsest words, and thrust into my hand at every turn) from one mean villain, that I felt as if I had never known humiliation till that time. This shame my husband fixed upon me; hemmed me round with himself; steeped me in with his own hands, and of his own act, repeated hundreds of times. And thus—forced by the two from every point of rest I had—forced by the two to yield up the last retreat of love and gentleness within me, or to be a new misfortune on its innocent object—driven from each to each, and beset by one when I escaped the other—my anger rose almost to distraction against both. I do not know against which it rose higher—the master or the man!"

He watched her closely, as she stood before him in the very triumph of her indignant beauty. She was resolute, he saw; undaunted; with no more fear of him than of a worm,

"What should I say of honour or of chastity to you?" she went on. "What meaning would it have to you; what meaning would it have from me? But if I tell you that the lightest touch of your hand makes my blood cold with antipathy; that from the hour when I first saw and hated you, to now, when my instinctive repugnance is enhanced by every minute's knowledge of you I have since had, you have been a loathsome creature to me which has not its like on earth; how then?"

He answered, with a faint laugh, "Ay! How then, my queen?"

"On that night when, emboldened by the scene you had assisted at, you dared come to my room and speak to me," she said, "what passed?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed again.

"What passed?" she said.

"Your memory is so distinct," he returned, "that I have no doubt you can recall it."

"I can," she said. "Hear it! Proposing then this flight—not this flight, but the flight you thought it—you told me that in the having given you that meeting, and leaving you to be discovered there, if you so thought fit; and in the having suffered you to be alone with me many times before,—and having made the opportunities, you said,—and in the having openly avowed to you that I had no feeling for my husband but aversion, and no care for myself,—"

I was lost; I had given you the power to traduce my name; and I lived, in virtuous reputation, at the pleasure of your breath."

"All stratagems in love—" he interrupted, smiling. "The old adage—"

"On that night," said Edith, "and then the struggle that I long had had with something that was not respect for my good fame—that was I know not what—perhaps the clinging to that last retreat—was ended. On that night, and then I turned from everything but passion and resentment. I struck a blow that laid your lofty master in the dust, and set you there, before me, looking at me now, and knowing what I mean."

He sprung up from his chair with a great oath. She put her hand into her bosom, and not a finger trembled, not a hair upon her head was stirred. He stood still: she too: the table and chair between them.

"When I forget that this man put his lips to mine that night, and held me in his arms as he has done again to-night," said Edith, pointing at him; "when I forget the taint of his kiss upon my cheek—the cheek that Florence would have laid her guiltless face against—when I forget my meeting with her while that taint was hot upon me, and in what a flood the knowledge rushed upon me when I saw her, that in releasing her from the persecution I had caused her by my love, I brought a shame and degradation on her name through mine, and in all time to come should be the solitary figure representing in her mind her first avoidance of a guilty creature—then, Husband, from whom I stand divorced henceforth, I will forget these last two years, and undo what I have done, and undeceive you!"

Her flashing eyes, uplifted for a moment, lighted again on Carker, and she held some letters out in her left hand.

"See these!" she said contemptuously. "You have addressed these to me in the false name you go by; one here, some elsewhere on my road. The seals are unbroken. Take them back!"

She crunched them in her hand, and tossed them to his feet. And, as she looked upon him now, a smile was on her face.

"We meet and part to-night," she said. "You have fallen on Sicilian days and sensual rest too soon. You might have cajoled, and fawned, and played your traitor's part a little longer, and grown richer. You purchase your voluptuous retirement dear!"

"Edith!" he retorted, menacing her with his hand. "Sit down! Have done with this! What devil possesses you?"

"Their name is Legion," she replied, uprearing her proud form as if she would have crushed him; "you and your master have raised them in a fruitful house, and they shall tear you both. False to him, false to his innocent child, false every way and everywhere, go forth and boast of me, and gnash your teeth for once to know that you are lying!"

He stood before her, muttering and menacing, and scowling round as if for something that would help him to conquer her; but with the same indomitable spirit she opposed him, with out faltering.

"In every vaunt you make," she said, "have my triumph. I single out in you the meanest man I know, the parasite and tool of the proud tyrant, that his wound may go the deeper and may rankle more. Boast, and revenge me on him! You know how you can here to-night; you know how you stand cowering there; you see yourself in colours quite despicable, if not as odious, as those in which see you. Boast, then, and revenge me on yourself."

The foam was on his lips; the wet stood on his forehead. If she would have faltered once for only one half-moment, he would have pinioned her; but she was as firm as rock, at her searching eyes never left him.

"We don't part so," he said. "Do you think I am drivelling, to let you go in your milder temper?"

"Do you think," she answered, "that I am to be stayed?"

"I'll try, my dear," he said with a ferocious gesture of his head.

"God's mercy on you, if you try by coming near me!" she replied.

"And what," he said, "if there are none of these same boasts and vaunts on my part? What if I were to turn too? Come!" and his teeth fairly shone again. "We must make a treaty this, or I may take some unexpected course. Sit down, sit down!"

"Too late!" she cried, with eyes that seemed to sparkle fire. "I have thrown my fame a good name to the winds! I have resolved to bear the shame that will attach to me—resolved to know that it attaches falsely—that you know it too—and that he does not, never can, and never shall. I'll die and make no sign. If this I am here alone with you at the dead night. For this I have met you here, in a false name, as your wife. For this I have been seen here by those men, and left here. Nothing can save you now."

He would have sold his soul to root her,

her beauty, to the floor, and make her arms drop at her sides, and have her at his mercy. But he could not look at her, and not be afraid of her. He saw a strength within her that was resistless. He saw that she was desperate, and that her unquenchable hatred of him would stop at nothing. His eyes followed the hand that was put with such rugged, uncongenial purpose into her white bosom, and he thought that if it struck at him, and failed, it would strike there just as soon.

He did not venture, therefore, to advance towards her; but the door by which he had entered was behind him, and he stepped back to look it.

"Lastly, take my warning! look to yourself!" she said, and smiled again. "You have been betrayed, as all betrayers are. It has been made known that you are in this place, or were to be, or have been. If I live, I saw my husband in a carriage in the street to-night!"

"Strumpet, it's false!" cried Carker.

At the moment, the bell rang loudly in the hall. He turned white, as she held her hand up like an enchantress, at whose invocation the sound had come.

"Hark! do you hear it?"

He set his back against the door; for he saw a change in her, and fancied she was coming on to pass him. But, in a moment, she was gone through the opposite doors communicating with the bedchamber, and they shut upon her.

Once turned, once changed in her inflexible, unyielding look, he felt that he could cope with her. He thought a sudden terror, occasioned by this night alarm, had subdued her; not the less readily for her overwrought condition. Throwing open the doors, he followed, almost instantly.

But the room was dark; and, as she made no answer to his call, he was fain to go back for the lamp. He held it up, and looked round everywhere, expecting to see her crouching in some corner; but the room was empty. So, into the drawing-room and dining-room he went, in succession, with the uncertain steps of a man in a strange place; looking fearfully about, and prying behind screens and couches; but she was not there. No, nor in the hall, which was so bare that he could see that at a glance.

All this time the ringing at the bell was constantly renewed, and those without were beating at the door. He put his lamp down at a distance, and going near it, listened. There were several voices talking together; at least two of them in English; and though the door was thick, and there was great confusion, he knew one of these too well to doubt whose voice it was.

He took up his lamp again, and came back quickly through all the rooms, stopping as he quitted each, and looking round for her, with the light raised above his head. He was standing thus in the bedchamber, when the door leading to the little passage in the wall caught his eye. He went to it, and found it fastened on the other side; but she had dropped a veil in going through, and shut it in the door.

All this time the people on the stairs were ringing at the bell, and knocking with their hands and feet.

He was not a coward; but these sounds; what had gone before; the strangeness of the place, which had confused him, even in his return from the hall; the frustration of his schemes (for, strange to say, he would have been much bolder if they had succeeded); the unseasonable time; the recollection of having no one near to whom he could appeal for any friendly office; above all, the sudden sense, which made even his heart beat like lead, that the man whose confidence he had outraged, and whom he had so treacherously deceived, was there to recognise and challenge him with his mask plucked off his face; struck a panic through him. He tried the door in which the veil was shut, but couldn't force it. He opened one of the windows, and looked down through the lattice of the blind into the courtyard; but it was a high leap, and the stones were pitiless.

The ringing and knocking still continuing—his panic too—he went back to the door in the bedchamber, and with some new efforts, each more stubborn than the last, wrenched it open. Seeing the little staircase not far off, and feeling the night air coming up, he stole back for his hat and coat, made the door as secure after him as he could, crept down lamp in hand, extinguished it on seeing the street, and having put it in a corner, went out where the stars were shining.

CHAPTER LV.

ROB THE GRINDER LOSES HIS PLACE.



HE porter at the iron gate which shut the courtyard from the street had left the little wicket of his house open, and was gone away; no doubt to mingle in the distant noise at the door on the great staircase. Lifting the latch softly, Carker crept out, and shutting the jangling gate after him with as little noise as possible, hurried off.

In the fever of his mortification and unavail-

ing rage, the panic that had seized upon him mastered him completely. It rose to such a height that he would have blindly encountered almost any risk, rather than meet the man of whom, two hours ago, he had been utterly regardless. His fierce arrival, which he had never expected; the sound of his voice; their having been so near a meeting face to face; he would have braved out this, after the first momentary shock of alarm, and would have put as bold a front upon his guilt as any villain. But the springing of his mine upon himself seemed to have rent and shivered all his hardihood and self-reliance. Spurned like any reptile; entrapped and mocked; turned upon, and trodden down by the proud woman whose mind he had slowly poisoned, as he thought, until she had sunk into the mere creature of his pleasure; undeceived in his deceit, and with his fox's hide stripped off, he sneaked away, abashed, degraded, and afraid.

Some other terror came upon him, quite removed from this of being pursued, suddenly like an electric shock, as he was creeping through the streets. Some visionary terror, unintelligible and inexplicable, associated with a trembling of the ground,—a rush and sweep of something through the air, like Death upon the wing. He shrunk, as if to let the thing go by. It was not gone, it never had been there, yet what a startling horror it had left behind.

He raised his wicked face, so full of trouble, to the night sky where the stars, so full of peace, were shining on him as they had been when he first stole out into the air; and stopped to think what he should do. The dread of being hunted in a strange, remote place, where the laws might not protect him—the novelty of the feeling that it *was* strange and remote, originating in his being left alone so suddenly amid the ruins of his plans—his greater dread of seeking refuge now in Italy or in Sicily, where men might be hired to assassinate him, he thought, at any dark street corner—the waywardness of guilt and fear—perhaps some sympathy of action with the turning back of all his schemes—impelled him to turn back too, and go to England.

"I am safer there, in any case. If I should not decide," he thought, "to give this fool a meeting, I am less likely to be traced there than abroad here, now. And if I should (this cursed fit being over); at least I shall not be alone, without a soul to speak to, or advise with, or stand by me. I shall not be run in upon and worried like a rat."

He muttered Edith's name, and clenched his hands. As he crept along in the shadow of the

massive buildings, he set his teeth, and muttered dreadful imprecations on her head, and looked from side to side as if in search of her. Thus, he stole on to the gate of an inn yard. The people were abed; but his ringing at the bell soon produced a man with a lantern, in company with whom he was presently in a dim coach-house, bargaining for the hire of an old phaeton to Paris.

The bargain was a short one; and the horses were soon sent for. Leaving word that the carriage was to follow him when they came, he stole away again, beyond the town, past the old ramparts, out on the open road, which seemed to glide away along the dark plain like a stream!

Whither did it flow? What was the end of it? As he paused, with some such suggestion within him, looking over the gloomy flat where the slender trees marked out the way, again that flight of Death came rushing up, again went on, impetuous and resistless, again was nothing but a horror in his mind, dark as the scene, and undefined as its remotest verge.

There was no wind; there was no passing shadow on the deep shade of the night; there was no noise. The city lay behind him, lighted here and there, and starry worlds were hidden by the masonry of spire and roof that hardly made out any shapes against the sky. Dark and lonely distance lay around him everywhere and the clocks were faintly striking two.

He went forward for what appeared a long time, and a long way; often stopping to listen. At last the ringing of horses' bells greeted his anxious ears. Now softer, and now louder, now inaudible, now ringing very slowly over bad ground, now brisk and merry, it came on; until, with a loud shouting and lashing, a shadowy postillion, muffled to the eyes, checked his four struggling horses at his side.

"Who goes there? Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur has walked a long way in the dark midnight."

"No matter. Every one to his taste. Were there any other horses ordered at the post-house?"

"A thousand devils!—and pardon! other horses? at this hour? No."

"Listen, my friend. I am much hurried. Let us see how fast we can travel. The faster the more money there will be to drink. Off we go, then! Quick!"

"Halloa! whoop! Halloo! Hi!" Away, at a gallop, over the black landscape, scattering the dust and dirt like spray!

The clatter and commotion echoed to the

hurry and discordance of the fugitive's ideas. Nothing clear without, and nothing clear within. Objects flitting past, merging into one another, dimly described, confusedly lost sight of, gone! Beyond the chattering scraps of fence and cottage immediately upon the road, a lowering waste. Beyond the shifting images that rose up in his mind, and vanished as they showed themselves, a black expanse of dread and rage and baffled villainy. Occasionally a sigh of mountain air came from the distant Jura, fading along the plain. Sometimes that rush, which was so furious and horrible, again came sweeping through his fancy, passed away, and left a chill upon his blood.

The lamps, gleaming on the medley of horses' heads, jumbled with the shadowy driver, and the fluttering of his cloak, made a thousand indistinct shapes, answering to his thoughts. Shadows of familiar people, stooping at their desks and books, in their remembered attitudes; strange apparitions of the man whom he was flying from, or of Edith; repetitions, in the ringing bells and rolling wheels, of words that had been spoken; confusions of time and place, making last night a month ago, a month ago last night—home now distant beyond hope, now instantly accessible; commotion, discord, hurry, darkness, and confusion in his mind, and all around him.—Hulloa! Hi! away at a gallop over the black landscape; dust and dirt flying like spray, the smoking horses snorting and plunging as if each of them were ridden by a demon, away in a frantic triumph on the dark road—whither?

Again the nameless shock comes, speeding up, and, as it passes, the bells ring in his ears "Whither?" The wheels roar in his ears "Whither?" All the noise and rattle shapes itself into that cry. The lights and shadows dance upon the horses' heads like imps. No stopping now: no slackening! On, on! Away with him upon the dark road wildly!

He could not think to any purpose. He could not separate one subject of reflection from another, sufficiently to dwell upon it, by itself, for a minute at a time. The crash of his project for the gaining of a voluptuous compensation for past restraint; the overthrow of his treachery to one who had been true and generous to him, but whose least proud word and look he had treasured up, at interest, for years—for false and subtle men will always secretly despise and dislike the object upon which they fawn, and always resent the payment and receipt of homage that they know to be worthless; these were the themes uppermost in his mind. A lurking rage

against the woman who had so entrapped him and avenged herself was always there; crude and misshapen schemes of retaliation upon her floated in his brain; but nothing was distinct. A hurry and contradiction pervaded all his thoughts. Even while he was so busy with this fevered, ineffectual thinking, his one constant idea was, that he would postpone reflection until some indefinite time.

Then, the old days before the second marriage rose up in his remembrance. He thought how jealous he had been of the boy, how jealous he had been of the girl, how artfully he had kept intruders at a distance, and drawn a circle round his dupe that none but himself should cross; and then he thought, had he done all this to be flying now, like a scared thief, from only the poor dupe?

He could have laid hands upon himself for his cowardice, but it was the very shadow of his defeat, and could not be separated from it. To have his confidence in his own knavery so shattered at a blow—to be within his own knowledge such a miserable tool—was like being paralysed. With an impotent ferocity he raged at Edith, and hated Mr. Dombey, and hated himself, but still he fled, and could do nothing else.

Again and again he listened for the sound of wheels behind. Again and again his fancy heard it, coming on louder and louder. At last he was so persuaded of this, that he cried out "Stop!" preferring even the loss of ground to such uncertainty.

The word soon brought carriage, horses, driver, all in a heap together across the road.

"The devil!" cried the driver, looking over his shoulder. "What's the matter?"

"Hark! What's that?"

"What?"

"That noise."

"Ah Heaven, be quiet, cursed brigand!" to a horse who shook his bells. "What noise?"

"Behind. Is it not another carriage at a gallop? There! What's that?"

"Miscreant with a pig's head, stand still!" to another horse, who bit another, who frightened the other two, who plunged and backed. "There is nothing coming."

"Nothing?"

"No, nothing but the day yonder."

"You are right, I think. I hear nothing now indeed. Go on!"

The entangled equipage, half hidden in the reeking cloud from the horses, goes on slowly at first, for the driver, checked unnecessarily in his progress, sulkily takes out a pocket-knife, and puts

a new lash to his whip. Then "Hallo, whoop ! Hallo, hi !" Away once more, savagely.

And now the stars faded, and the day glimmered, and standing in the carriage, looking back, he could discern the track by which he had come, and see that there was no traveller within view on all the heavy expanse. And soon it was broad day, and the sun began to shine on corn-fields and vineyards ; and solitary labourers, risen from little temporary huts by heaps of stones upon the road, were, here and there, at work repairing the highway, or eating bread. By-and-by there were peasants going to their daily labour, or to market, or lounging at the doors of poor cottages, gazing idly at him as he passed. And then there was a post-yard, ankle deep in mud, with steaming dunghills and vast outhouses half ruined ; and looking on this dainty prospect, an immense, old, shadeless, glaring stone château, with half its windows blinded, and green damp crawling lazily over it, from the balustraded terrace to the taper tips of the extinguishers upon the turrets.

Gathered up moodily in a corner of the carriage, and only intent on going fast—except when he stood up, for a mile together, and looked back ; which he would do whenever there was a piece of open country—he went on, still postponing thought indefinitely, and still always tormented with thinking to no purpose.

Shame, disappointment, and discomfiture gnawed at his heart ; a constant apprehension of being overtaken, or met—for he was groundlessly afraid even of travellers who came towards him by the way he was going—oppressed him heavily. The same intolerable awe and dread that had come upon him in the night, returned unweakened in the day. The monotonous ringing of the bells and tramping of the horses ; the monotony of his anxiety, and useless rage ; the monotonous wheel of fear, regret, and passion, he kept turning round and round ; made the journey like a vision, in which nothing was quite real but his own torment.

It was a vision of long roads ; that stretched away to an horizon always receding and never gained ; of ill-paved towns, up hill and down, where faces came to dark doors and ill-glazed windows, and where rows of mud-bespattered cows and oxen were tied up for sale in the long narrow streets, butting and lowing, and receiving blows on their blunt heads from bludgeons that might have beaten them in ; of bridges, crosses, churches, post-yards, new horses being put in against their wills, and the horses of the last stage reeking, panting, and laying their drooping heads together dolefully at stable doors ; of

little cemeteries with black crosses settled sideways in the graves, and withered wreaths upon them dropping away ; again of long, long roads, dragging themselves out, up hill and down, to the treacherous horizon.

Of morning, noon, and sunset ; night, and the rising of an early moon. Of long roads temporarily left behind, and a rough pavement reached ; of battering and clattering over it, and looking up, among house roofs, at a great church tower ; of getting out and eating hastily, and drinking draughts of wine that had no cheering influence ; of coming forth afoot, among a host of beggars—blind men with quivering eyelids, led by old women holding candles to their faces ; idiot girls ; the lame, the epileptic, and the palsied—of passing through the clamour, and looking from his seat at the upturned countenances and outstretched hands, with a hurried dread of recognising some pursuer pressing forward—of galloping away again upon the long, long road, gathered up, dull and stunned, in his corner, or rising to see where the moon shone faintly on a patch of the same endless road miles away, or looking back to see who followed.

Of never sleeping, but sometimes dozing with unclosed eyes, and springing up with a start, and a reply aloud to an imaginary voice. Of cursing himself for being there, for having fled, for having let her go, for not having confronted and defied him. Of having a deadly quarrel with the whole world, but chiefly with himself. Of blighting everything with his black mood as he was carried on and away.

It was a fevered vision of things past and present all confounded together ; of his life and journey blended into one. Of being madly hurried somewhere, whither he must go. Of old scenes starting up among the novelties through which he travelled. Of musing and brooding over what was past and distant, and seeming to take no notice of the actual objects he encountered, but with a wearisome, exhausted consciousness of being bewildered by them, and having their images all crowded in his hot brain after they were gone.

A vision of change upon change, and still the same monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest. Of town and country, post-yards, horses, drivers, hill and valley, light and darkness, road and pavement, height and hollow, wet weather and dry, and still the same monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest. A vision of tending on, at last, towards the distant capital by busier roads, and sweeping round by old cathedrals, and dashing

through small towns and villages, less thinly scattered on the road than formerly, and sitting shrouded in his corner with his cloak up to his face, as people passing by looked at him.

Of rolling on and on, always postponing thought, and always racked with thinking; of being unable to reckon up the hours he had been upon the road, or to comprehend the points of time and place in his journey. Of being parched and giddy, and half mad. Of pressing on, in spite of all, as if he could not stop, and coming into Paris, where the turbid river held its swift course undisturbed, between two brawling streams of life and motion.

A troubled vision, then, of bridges, quays, interminable streets; of wine-shops, water-carriers, great crowds of people, soldiers, coaches, military drums, arcades. Of the monotony of bells and wheels and horses' feet being at length lost in the universal din and uproar. Of the gradual subsidence of that noise as he passed out in another carriage, by a different barrier from that by which he had entered. Of the restoration, as he travelled on towards the sea-coast, of the monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest.

Of sunset once again, and nightfall. Of long roads again, and dead of night, and feeble lights in windows by the roadside; and still the old monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest. Of dawn, and daybreak, and the rising of the sun. Of toiling slowly up a hill, and feeling on its top the fresh sea breeze; and seeing the morning light upon the edges of the distant waves. Of coming down into a harbour when the tide was at its full, and seeing fishing-boats float in, and glad women and children waiting for them. Of nets and seamen's clothes spread out to dry upon the shore; of busy sailors, and their voices high among ships' masts and rigging; of the buoyancy and brightness of the water, and the universal sparkling.

Of receding from the coast, and looking back upon it from the deck when it was a haze upon the water, with here and there a little opening of bright land where the Sun struck. Of the swell, and flash, and murmur of the calm sea. Of another grey line on the ocean, on the vessel's track, fast growing clearer and higher. Of cliffs and buildings, and a windmill, and a church, becoming more and more visible upon it. Of steaming on at last into smooth water, and mooring to a pier whence groups of people looked down, greeting friends on board. Of disembarking, passing among them quickly, shunning every one; and of being at last again in England.

He had thought, in his dream, of going down into a remote country place he knew, and lying quiet there, while he secretly informed himself of what transpired, and determined how to act. Still in the same stunned condition, he remembered a certain station on the railway, where he would have to branch off to his place of destination, and where there was a quiet inn. Here he indistinctly resolved to tarry and rest.

With this purpose he slunk into a railway carriage as quickly as he could, and lying there wrapped in his cloak as if he were asleep, was soon borne far away from the sea, and deep into the inland green. Arrived at his destination, he looked out and surveyed it carefully. He was not mistaken in his impression of the place. It was a retired spot, on the borders of a little wood. Only one house, newly built or altered for the purpose, stood there, surrounded by its neat garden; the small town that was nearest was some miles away. Here he alighted, then, and going straight into the tavern, unobserved by any one, secured two rooms up-stairs communicating with each other, and sufficiently retired.

His object was to rest, and recover the command of himself, and the balance of his mind. Imbecile discomfiture and rage—so that, as he walked about his room, he ground his teeth—had complete possession of him. His thoughts, not to be stopped or directed, still wandered where they would, and dragged him after them. He was stupefied, and he was wearied to death.

But, as if there were a curse upon him that he should never rest again, his drowsy senses would not lose their consciousness. He had no more influence with them, in this regard, than if they had been another man's. It was not that they forced him to take note of present sounds and objects, but that they would not be diverted from the whole hurried vision of his journey. It was constantly before him all at once. She stood there, with her dark, disdainful eyes again upon him; and he was riding on, nevertheless, through town and country, light and darkness, wet weather and dry, over road and pavement, hill and valley, height and hollow, jaded and scared by the monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest.

"What day is this?" he asked of the waiter, who was making preparation for his dinner.

"Day, sir?"

"Is it Wednesday?"

"Wednesday, sir? No, sir. Thursday, sir."

"I forgot. How goes the time? My watch is unwound."

"Wants a few minutes of five o'clock, sir. Been travelling a long time, sir, perhaps."

"Yes."

"By rail, sir?"

"Yes."

"Very confusing, sir. Not much in the habit of travelling by rail myself, sir, but gentlemen frequently say so."

"Do many gentlemen come here?"

"Pretty well, sir, in general. Nobody here at present. Rather slack just now, sir. Everything is slack, sir."

He made no answer; but had risen into a sitting posture on the sofa where he had been lying, and leaned forward with an arm on each knee, staring at the ground. He could not master his own attention for a minute together. It rushed away where it would, but it never, for an instant, lost itself in sleep.

He drank a quantity of wine after dinner in yain. No such artificial means would bring sleep to his eyes. His thoughts, more incoherent, dragged him more unmercifully after them—as if a wretch, condemned to such expiation, were drawn at the heels of wild horses. No oblivion, and no rest.

How long he sat drinking and brooding, and being dragged in imagination hither and thither, no one could have told less correctly than he. But he knew that he had been sitting a long time by candle-light, when he started up and listened in a sudden terror.

For now, indeed, it was no fancy. The ground shook, the house rattled, the fierce impetuous rush was in the air! He felt it come up, and go darting by; and even when he had hurried to the window, and saw what it was, he stood, shrinking from it, as if it were not safe to look.

A curse upon the fiery devil, thundering along so smoothly, tracked through the distant valley by a glare of light and lurid smoke, and gone! He felt as if he had been plucked out of its path, and saved from being torn asunder. It made him shrink and shudder even now, when its faintest hum was hushed, and when the lines of iron road he could trace in the moonlight, running to a point, were as empty and as silent as a desert.

Unable to rest, and irresistibly attracted—or he thought so—to this road, he went out, and lounged on the brink of it, marking the way the train had gone, by the yet smoking cinders that were lying in its track. After a lounge of some half-hour in the direction by which it had disappeared, he turned and walked the other way—still keeping to the brink of the road—past

the inn garden, and a long way down; looking curiously at the bridges, signals, lamps, and wondering when another devil would come by.

A trembling of the ground, a quick vibration in his ears; a distant shriek; a dull light advancing, quickly changed to two red eyes, and a fierce fire, dropping glowing coals; an irresistible bearing on of a great roaring and dilating mass; a high wind, and a rattle—another come and gone, and he holding to a gate, as if to save himself!

He waited for another, and for another. He walked back to his former point, and back again to that, and still, through the wearisome vision of his journey, looked for these approaching monsters. He loitered about the station, waiting until one should stay to call there; and when one did, and was detached for water, he stood parallel with it, watching its heavy wheels and brazen front, and thinking what a cruel power and might it had. Ugh! To see the great wheels slowly turning, and to think of being run down and crushed!

Disordered with wine and want of rest—that want which nothing, although he was so weary, would appease—these ideas and objects assumed a diseased importance in his thoughts. When he went back to his room, which was not until near midnight, they still haunted him, and he sat listening for the coming of another.

So in his bed, whither he repaired with no hope of sleep. He still lay listening; and, when he felt the trembling and vibration, got up and went to the window, to watch (as he could from its position) the dull light changing to the two red eyes, and the fierce fire dropping glowing coals, and the rush of the giant as it fled past, and the track of glare and smoke along the valley. Then he would glance in the direction by which he intended to depart at sunrise, as there was no rest for him there; and would lie down again, to be troubled by the vision of his journey, and the old monotony of bells and wheels and horses' feet, until another came. This lasted all night. So far from resuming the mastery of himself, he seemed, if possible, to lose it more and more as the night crept on. When the dawn appeared, he was still tormented with thinking, still postponing thought until he should be in a better state; the past, present, and future all floated confusedly before him, and he had lost all power of looking steadily at any one of them.

"At what time," he asked the man who had waited on him overnight, now entering with a candle, "do I leave here, did you say?"

"About a quarter after four, sir. Express comes through at four, sir. It don't stop."

He passed his hand across his throbbing head, and looked at his watch. Nearly half-past three.

"Nobody going with you, sir, probably," observed the man. "Two gentlemen here, sir, but they're waiting for the train to London."

"I thought you said there was nobody here," said Carker, turning upon him with the ghost of his old smile, when he was angry or suspicious.

"Not then, sir. Two gentlemen came in the night by the short train that stops here, sir. Warm water, sir?"

"No; and take away the candle. There's day enough for me."

Having thrown himself upon the bed, half-dressed, he was at the window as the man left the room. The cold light of morning had succeeded to night, and there was already, in the sky, the red suffusion of the coming sun. He bathed his head and face with water—there was no cooling influence in it for him—hurriedly put on his clothes, paid what he owed, and went out.

The air struck chill and comfortless as it breathed upon him. There was a heavy dew; and, hot as he was, it made him shiver. After a glance at the place where he had walked last night, and at the signal lights burning feebly in the morning, and bereft of their significance, he turned to where the sun was rising, and beheld it in its glory, as it broke upon the scene.

So awful, so transcendent in its beauty, so divinely solemn. As he cast his faded eyes upon it, where it rose, tranquil and serene, unmoved by all the wrong and wickedness on which its beams had shone since the beginning of the world, who shall say that some weak sense of virtue upon Earth, and its reward in Heaven, did not manifest itself, even to him? If ever he remembered sister or brother with a touch of tenderness and remorse, who shall say it was not then?

He needed some such touch then. Death was on him. He was marked off from the living world, and going down into his grave.

He paid the money for his journey to the country place he had thought of; and was walking to and fro alone, looking along the lines of iron, across the valley in one direction, and towards a dark bridge near at hand in the other; when, turning in his walk, where it was bounded by one end of the wooden stage on which he paced up and down, he saw the man from whom he had fled, emerging from the door by which he himself had entered there. And their eyes met.

In the quick unsteadiness of the surprise, he staggered, and slipped on to the road below him. But, recovering his feet immediately, he

stepped back a pace or two upon that road, to interpose some wider space between them, and looked at his pursuer, breathing short and quick.

He heard a shout—another—saw the face change from its vindictive passion to a faint sickness and terror—felt the earth tremble—knew in a moment that the rush was come—uttered a shriek—looked round—saw the red eyes, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him—was beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air.

When the traveller who had been recognised recovered from a swoon, he saw them bringing from a distance something covered, that lay heavy and still, upon a board, between four men, and saw that others drove some dogs away that sniffed upon the road, and soaked his blood up with a train of ashes.

CHAPTER LVI.

SEVERAL PEOPLE DELIGHTED, AND THE GAME CHICKEN DISGUSTED.

THE Midshipman was all alive. Mr. Toots and Susan had arrived at last. Susan had run up-stairs like a young woman bereft of her senses, and Mr. Toots and the Chicken had gone into the parlour.

"Oh my own pretty darling sweet Miss Floy!" cried the Nipper, running into Florence's room, "to think that it should come to this and I should find you here my own dear dove with nobody to wait upon you and no home to call your own but never never will I go away again Miss Floy for though I may not gather moss I'm not a rolling stone nor is my heart a stone or else it wouldn't bust as it is busting now oh dear oh dear!"

Pouring out these words, without the faintest indication of a stop of any sort, Miss Nipper, on her knees beside her mistress, hugged her close.

"Oh love!" cried Susan, "I know all that's past, I know it all my tender pet and I'm a choking give me air!"

"Susan, dear good Susan!" said Florence.

"Oh bless her! I that was her little maid when she was a little child! and is she really, really truly going to be married?" exclaimed Susan, in a burst of pain and pleasure, pride and

grief, and Heaven knows how many other conflicting feelings.

"Who told you so?" said Florence.

"Oh gracious me! that innocent creetur Toots," returned Susan hysterically. "I knew he must be right my dear, because he took on so. He's the devotedest and innocentest infant! And is my darling," pursued Susan, with another close embrace and burst of tears, "really, really going to be married?"

The mixture of compassion, pleasure, tenderness, protection, and regret with which the Nipper constantly recurred to this subject, and, at every such recurrence, raised her head to look in the young face and kiss it, and then laid her head again upon her mistress's shoulder, caressing her and sobbing, was as womanly and good a thing, in its way, as ever was seen in the world.

"There, there!" said the soothing voice of Florence presently. "Now you're quite yourself, dear Susan!"

Miss Nipper, sitting down upon the floor, at her mistress's feet, laughing and sobbing, holding her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes with one hand, and patting Diogenes with the other as he licked her face, confessed to being more composed, and laughed and cried a little more in proof of it.

"I—I—I never did see such a creetur as that Toots," said Susan, "in all my born days, never!"

"So kind," suggested Florence.

"And so coming!" Susan sobbed. "The way he's been going on inside with me, with that respectable Chicken on the box!"

"About what, Susan?" inquired Florence timidly.

"Oh about Lieutenant Walters, and Captain Gills, and you my dear Miss Floy, and the silent tomb," said Susan.

"The silent tomb!" repeated Florence.

"He says"—here Susan burst into a violent hysterical laugh—"that he'll go down into it now, immediately and quite comfortable, but bless your heart my dear Miss Floy he won't, he's a great deal too happy in seeing other people happy for that, he may not be a Solomon," pursued the Nipper, with her usual volubility, "nor do I say he is, but this I do say, a less selfish human creature human nature never knew."

Miss Nipper, being still hysterical, laughed immoderately after making this energetic declaration, and then informed Florence that he was waiting below to see her; which would be a rich repayment for the trouble he had had in his late expedition.

Florence entreated Susan to beg of Mr. Toots

as a favour that she might have the pleasure of thanking him for his kindness; and Susan, in a few moments, produced that young gentleman, still very much dishevelled in appearance, and stammering exceedingly.

"Miss Dombey," said Mr. Toots, "to be again permitted to—to—gaze—at least, not to gaze, but—I don't exactly know what I was going to say, but it's of no consequence."

"I have to thank you so often," returned Florence, giving him both her hands, with all her innocent gratitude beaming in her face, "that I have no words left, and don't know how to do it."

"Miss Dombey," said Mr. Toots in an awful voice, "if it was possible that you could, consistently with your angelic nature, curse me, you would—if I may be allowed to say so—floor me infinitely less than by these undeserved expressions of kindness. Their effect upon me—is—but," said Mr. Toots abruptly, "this is a digression, and 's of no consequence at all."

As there seemed to be no means of replying to this but by thanking him again, Florence thanked him again.

"I could wish," said Mr. Toots, "to take this opportunity, Miss Dombey, if I might, of entering into a word of explanation. I should have had the pleasure of—of returning with Susan at an earlier period; but, in the first place, we didn't know the name of the relation to whose house she had gone, and, in the second, as she had left that relation's and gone to another at a distance, I think that scarcely anything short of the sagacity of the Chicken would have found her out in the time."

Florence was sure of it.

"This, however," said Mr. Toots, "is not the point. The company of Susan has been, I assure you, Miss Dombey, a consolation and satisfaction to me, in my state of mind, more easily conceived than described. The journey has been its own reward. That, however, still, is not the point. Miss Dombey, I have before observed that I know I am not what is considered a quick person. I am perfectly aware of that. I don't think anybody could be better acquainted with his own—if it was not too strong an expression, I should say with the thickness of his own—head than myself. But, Miss Dombey, I do, notwithstanding, perceive the state of—of things—with Lieutenant Walters. Whatever agony that state of things may have caused me (which is of no consequence at all), I am bound to say, that Lieutenant Walters is a person who appears to be worthy of the blessing that has fallen on his—on his brow. May he wear it

long, and appreciate it, as a very different and very unworthy individual, that it is of no consequence to name, would have done! That, however, still, is not the point. Miss Dombey, Captain Gills is a friend of mine; and during the interval that is now elapsing, I believe it would afford Captain Gills pleasure to see me occasionally coming backwards and forwards here. It would afford me pleasure so to come. But I cannot forget that I once committed myself, fatally, at the corner of the square at Brighton; and if my presence will be, in the least degree, unpleasant to you, I only ask you to name it to me now, and assure you that I shall perfectly understand you. I shall not consider it at all unkind, and shall only be too delighted and happy to be honoured with your confidence."

"Mr. Toots," returned Florence, "if you, who are so old and true a friend of mine, were to stay away from this house now, you would make me very unhappy. It can never, never give me any feeling but pleasure to see you."

"Miss Dombey," said Mr. Toots, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, "if I shed a tear, it is a tear of joy. It is of no consequence, and I am very much obliged to you. I may be allowed to remark, after what you have so kindly said, that it is not my intention to neglect my person any longer."

Florence received this intimation with the prettiest expression of perplexity possible.

"I mean," said Mr. Toots, "that I shall consider it my duty as a fellow-creature generally, until I am claimed by the silent tomb, to make the best of myself, and to—to have my boots as brightly polished as—as circumstances will admit of. This is the last time, Miss Dombey, of my intruding any observation of a private and personal nature. I thank you very much indeed. If I am not, in a general way, as sensible as my friends could wish me to be, or as I could wish myself, I really am, upon my word and honour, particularly sensible of what is considerate and kind. I feel," said Mr. Toots, in an impassioned tone, "as if I could express my feelings, at the present moment, in a most remarkable manner, if—if—I could only get a start."

Appearing not to get it, after waiting a minute or two to see if it would come, Mr. Toots took a hasty leave, and went below to seek the captain, whom he found in the shop.

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "what is now to take place between us, takes place under the sacred seal of confidence. It is the sequel, Captain Gills, of what has taken place between myself and Miss Dombey up-stairs."

"Alo and aloft, eh, my lad?" murmured the captain.

"Exactly so, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, whose fervour of acquiescence was greatly heightened by his entire ignorance of the captain's meaning. "Miss Dombey, I believe, Captain Gills, is to be shortly united to Lieutenant Walters?"

"Why, ay, my lad. We're all shipmets here, —Wal'r and sweetheart will be jined together in the house of bondage, as soon as the askings is over," whispered Captain Cuttle in his ear.

"The askings, Captain Gills!" repeated Mr. Toots.

"In the church, down yonder," said the captain, pointing his thumb over his shoulder.

"Oh! Yes!" returned Mr. Toots.

"And then," said the captain in his hoarse whisper, and tapping Mr. Toots on the chest with the back of his hand, and falling from him with a look of infinite admiration, "what follers? That there pretty creetur, as delicately brought up as a foreign bird, goes away upon the roaring main with Wal'r on a woyage to China."

"Lord, Captain Gills!" said Mr. Toots.

"Ay!" nodded the captain. "The ship as took him up, when he was wrecked in the hurricane that had drove her clean out of her course, was a China trader, and Wal'r made the woyage, and got into favour, aboard and ashore—being as smart and good, a lad as ever stepped—and so, the supercargo dying at Canton, he got made (having acted as clerk afore), and now he's supercargo aboard another ship, same owners. And so, you see," repeated the captain thoughtfully, "the pretty creetur goes away upon the roaring main with Wal'r, on a woyage to China."

Mr. Toots and Captain Cuttle heaved a sigh in concert.

"What then?" said the captain. "She loves him true. He loves her true. Them as should have loved and fended of her treated of her like the beasts as perish. When she, cast out of home, come here to me, and dropped upon them planks, her wounded heart was broke. I know it. I, Ed'ard Cuttle, see it. There's nowt but true, kind, steady love as can ever piece it up again. If so be I didn't know that, and didn't know as Wal'r was her true love, brother, and she his, I'd have these here blue arms and legs chopped off afore I'd let her go. But I *do* know it, and what then? Why, then, I say, Heaven go with 'em both, and so it will! Amen!"

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "let me have the pleasure of shaking hands. You've a way of saying things, that gives me an agreeable warmth all up my back. I say Amen. You are

aware, Captain Gills, that I, too, have adored Miss Dombey."

"Cheer up!" said the captain, laying his hand on Mr. Toots's shoulder. "Stand by, boy!"

"It is my intencion, Captain Gills," returned the spirited Mr. Toots, "to cheer up. Also to stand by, as much as possible. When the silent tomb shall yawn, Captain Gills, I shall be ready for burial; not before. But not being certain, just at present, of my power over myself, what I wish to say to you, and what I shall take it as a

particular favour if you will mention to Lieutenant Walters, is as follows."

"Is as follers," echoed the captain. "Steady!"

"Miss Dombey being so inexpressibly kind," continued Mr. Toots with watery eyes, "as to say that my presence is the reverse of disagreeable to her, and you and everybody here being no less forbearing and tolerant towards one who—who certainly," said Mr. Toots, with momentary dejection, "would appear to have been born by mistake, I shall come backwards and



"HE SAW THE FACE CHANGE FROM ITS VINDICTIVE PASSION TO A FAINT SICKNESS AND TERROR."

forwards of an evening during the short time we can all be together. But what I ask is this. If, at any moment, I find that I cannot endure the contemplation of Lieutenant Walters's bliss, and should rush out, I hope, Captain Gills, that you and he will both consider it as my misfortune, and not my fault, or the want of inward conflict. That you'll feel convinced I bear no malice to any living creature—least of all to Lieutenant Walters himself—and that you'll casualy re-

mark that I have gone out for a walk, or probably to see what o'clock it is by the Royal Exchange. Captain Gills, if you could enter into this arrangement, and could answer for Lieutenant Walters, it would be a relief to my feelings that I should think cheap at the sacrifice of a considerable portion of my property."

"My lad," returned the captain, "say no more. There ain't a colour you can run up as won't be made out, and answered to, by Wal'r and self."

"Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots, "my mind is greatly relieved. I wish to preserve the good opinion of all here. I—I—mean well, upon my honour, however badly I may show it. You know," said Mr. Toots, "it's exactly as if Burgess and Co. wished to oblige a customer with a most extraordinary pair of trousers, and *would not* cut out what they had in their minds."

With this apposite illustration, of which he seemed a little proud, Mr. Toots gave Captain Cuttle his blessing and departed.

The honest captain, with his Heart's Delight in the house, and Susan tending her, was a beaming and a happy man. As the days flew by, he grew more beaming and more happy every day. After some conferences with Susan (for whose wisdom the captain had a profound respect, and whose valiant precipitation of herself on Mrs. MacStinger he could never forget), he proposed to Florence that the daughter of the elderly lady who usually sat under the blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market should, for prudential reasons and considerations of privacy, be superseded in the temporary discharge of the household duties by some one who was not unknown to them, and in whom they could safely confide. Susan, being present, then named, in furtherance of a suggestion she had previously offered to the captain, Mrs. Richards. Florence brightened at the name. And Susan, setting off that very afternoon to the Toodle domicile, to sound Mrs. Richards, returned in triumph the same evening, accompanied by the identical rosy-checked, apple-faced Polly, whose demonstrations, when brought into Florence's presence, were hardly less affectionate than those of Susan Nipper herself.

This piece of generalship accomplished; from which the captain derived uncommon satisfaction, as he did, indeed, from everything else that was done, whatever it happened to be; Florence had next to prepare Susan for their approaching separation. This was a much more difficult task, as Miss Nipper was of a resolute disposition, and had fully made up her mind that she had come back never to be parted from her old mistress any more.

"As to wages dear Miss Floy," she said, "you wouldn't hint and wrong me so as think of naming them, for I've put money by and wouldn't sell my love and duty at a time like this even if the Savings Banks and me were total strangers or the Banks were broke to pieces, but you've never been without me darling from the time your poor dear ma was took away, and though I'm nothing to be boasted of you're used to me and oh my own dear mistress through so

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many years don't think of going anywhere without me, for it mustn't and can't be!"

"Dear Susan, I am going on a long, long voyage."

"Well Miss Floy, and what of that? the more you'll want me. Lengths of voyages ain't an object in my eyes, thank God!" said the impetuous Susan Nipper.

"But, Susan, I am going with Walter, and I would go with Walter anywhere—everywhere! Walter is poor, and I am very poor, and I must learn, now, both to help myself, and help him."

"Dear Miss Floy!" cried Susan, bursting out afresh, and shaking her head violently, "it's nothing new to you to help yourself and others too and be the patientest and truest of noble hearts, but let me talk to Mr. Walter Gay and settle it with him, for suffer you to go away across the world alone I cannot, and I won't."

"Alone, Susan?" returned Florence. "Alone? and Walter taking me with him?" Ah, what a bright, amazed, enraptured smile was on her face! He should have seen it. "I am sure you will not speak to Walter if I ask you not," she added tenderly; "and pray don't, dear."

Susan sobbed "Why not, Miss Floy?"

"Because," said Florence, "I am going to be his wife, to give him up my whole heart, and to live with him and die with him. He might think, if you said to him what you have said to me, that I am afraid of what is before me, or that you have some cause to be afraid for me. Why, Susan dear, I love him!"

Miss Nipper was so much affected by the quiet fervour of these words, and the simple, heartfelt, all-pervading earnestness expressed in them, and making the speaker's face more beautiful and pure than ever, that she could only cling to her again, crying, Was her little mistress really, really going to be married? and pitying, caressing, and protecting her, as she had done before.

But the Nipper, though susceptible of womanly weaknesses, was almost as capable of putting constraint upon herself as of attacking the redoubtable MacStinger. From that time she never returned to the subject, but was always cheerful, active, bustling, and hopeful. She did, indeed, inform Mr. Toots privately that she was only "keeping up" for the time, and that when it was all over, and Miss Dombey was gone, she might be expected to become a spectacle distressful; and Mr. Toots did also express that it was his case too, and that they would mingle their tears together; but she never otherwise indulged her private feelings in the presence of

Florence, or within the precincts of the Midshipman.

Limited and plain as Florence's wardrobe was—what a contrast to that prepared for the last marriage in which she had taken part!—there was a good deal to do in getting it ready, and Susan Nipper worked away at her side, all day, with the concentrated zeal of fifty sempstresses. The wonderful contributions Captain Cuttle would have made to this branch of the outfit, if he had been permitted—as pink parasols, tinted silk stockings, blue shoes, and other articles no less necessary on shipboard—would occupy some space in the recital. He was induced, however, by various fraudulent representations, to limit his contributions to a workbox and dressing-case, of each of which he purchased the very largest specimen that could be got for money. For ten days or a fortnight afterwards, he generally sat, during the greater part of the day, gazing at these boxes; divided between extreme admiration of them, and dejected misgivings that they were not gorgeous enough, and frequently diving out into the street to purchase some wild article that he deemed necessary to their completeness. But his master stroke was, the bearing of them both off suddenly one morning, and getting the two words FLORENCE GAV engraved upon a brass heart inlaid over the lid of each. After this, he smoked four pipes successively in the little parlour by himself, and was discovered chuckling at the expiration of as many hours.

Walter was busy and away all day, but came there every morning early to see Florence, and always passed the evening with her. Florence never left her high rooms but to steal down-stairs to wait for him when it was his time to come, or, sheltered by his proud, encircling arm, to bear him company to the door again, and sometimes peep into the street. In the twilight they were always together. Oh blessed time! Oh wandering heart at rest! Oh deep, exhaustless, mighty well of love, in which so much was sunk!

The cruel mark was on her bosom yet. It rose against her father with the breath she drew, it lay between her and her lover when he pressed her to his heart. But she forgot it. In the beating of that heart for her, and in the beating of her own for him, all harsher music was unheard, all stern, unloving hearts forgotten. Fragile and delicate she was, but with a might of love within her that could, and did, create a world to fly to, and to rest in, out of his one image.

How often did the great house, and the old days, come before her in the twilight time, when

she was sheltered by the arm, so proud, so fond, and creeping closer to him, shrunk within it at the recollection! How often, from remembering the night when she went down to that room and met the never-to-be-forgotten look, did she raise her eyes to those that watched her with such loving earnestness, and weep with happiness in such a refuge! The more she clung to it, the more the dear dead child was in her thoughts; but, as if the last time she had seen her father had been when he was sleeping and she kissed his face, she always left him so, and never, in her fancy, passed that hour.

"Walter dear," said Florence one evening, when it was almost dark, "do you know what I have been thinking to-day?"

"Thinking how the time is flying on, and how soon we shall be upon the sea, sweet Florence?"

"I don't mean that, Walter, though I think of that too. I have been thinking what a charge I am to you."

"A precious, sacred charge, dear heart! Why, I think that sometimes."

"You are laughing, Walter. I know that's much more in your thoughts than mine. But I mean a cost."

"A cost, my own?"

"In money, dear. All these preparations that Susan and I are so busy with—I have been able to purchase very little for myself. You were poor before. But how much poorer I shall make you, Walter!"

"And how much richer, Florence!"

Florence laughed, and shook her head.

"Besides," said Walter, "long ago—before I went to sea—I had a little purse presented to me, dearest, which had money in it."

"Ah!" returned Florence, laughing sorrowfully, "very little! Very little, Walter! But you must not think"—and here she laid her light hand on his shoulder, and looked into his face—"that I regret to be this burden on you. No, dear love, I am glad of it. I am happy in it. I wouldn't have it otherwise for all the world!"

"Nor I indeed, dear Florence."

"Ay! But, Walter, you can never feel it as I do. I am so proud of you! It makes my heart swell with such delight to know that those who speak of you must say you married a poor disowned girl, who had taken shelter here; who had no other home, no other friends; who had nothing—nothing! Oh, Walter, if I could have brought you millions, I never could have been so happy for your sake as I am!"

"And you, dear Florence? are you nothing?" he returned.

"No, nothing," Walter. Nothing but your

wife." The light hand stole about his neck, and the voice came nearer—nearer. "I am nothing any more, that is not you. I have no earthly hope any more, that is not you. I have nothing dear to me any more, that is not you."

Oh! well might Mr. Toots leave the little company that evening, and twice go out to correct his watch by the Royal Exchange, and once to keep an appointment with a banker which he suddenly remembered, and once to take a little turn to Aldgate Pump and back!

But, before he went upon these expeditions, or, indeed, before he came and before lights were brought, Walter said:

"Florence love, the lading of our ship is nearly finished, and probably on the very day of our marriage she will drop down the river. Shall we go away that morning, and stay in Kent until we go on board at Gravesend within a week?"

"If you please, Walter. I shall be happy anywhere. But——"

"Yes, my life?"

"You know," said Florence, "that we shall have no marriage party, and that nobody will distinguish us by our dress from other people. As we leave the same day, will you—will you take me somewhere that morning, Walter—early—before we go to church?"

Walter seemed to understand her, as so true a lover so truly loved should, and confirmed his ready promise with a kiss—with more than one, perhaps, or two or three, or five or six; and in the grave, calm, peaceful evening Florence was very happy.

Then into the quiet room came Susan Nipper and the candles; shortly afterwards, the tea, the captain, and the excursive Mr. Toots, who, as above mentioned, was frequently on the move afterwards, and passed but a restless evening. This, however, was not his habit: for he generally got on very well, by dint of playing at cribbage with the captain under the advice and guidance of Miss Nipper, and distracting his mind with the calculations incidental to the game; which he found to be a very effectual means of utterly confounding himself.

The captain's visage on these occasions presented one of the finest examples of combination and succession of expression ever observed. His instinctive delicacy and his chivalrous feeling towards Florence taught him that it was not a time for any boisterous jollity, or violent display of satisfaction. Certain floating reminiscences of Lovely Peg, on the other hand, were constantly struggling for a vent, and urging the captain to commit himself by some irreparable

demonstration. Anon, his admiration of Florence and Walter—well matched truly, and full of grace and interest in their youth, and love, and good looks, as they sat apart—would take such complete possession of him that he would lay down his cards, and beam upon them, dabbing his head all over with his pocket-handkerchief; until warned, perhaps, by the sudden rushing forth of Mr. Toots, that he had unconsciously been very instrumental indeed in making that gentleman miserable. This reflection would make the captain profoundly melancholy until the return of Mr. Toots; when he would fall to his cards again, with many side winks and nods, and polite waves of his hook at Miss Nipper, importing that he wasn't going to do so any more. The state that ensued on this was, perhaps, his best; for then, endeavouring to discharge all expression from his face, he would sit staring round the room, with all these expressions conveyed into it at once, and each wrestling with the other. Delighted admiration of Florence and Walter always overthrew the rest, and remained victorious and undisguised, unless Mr. Toots made another rush into the air, and then the captain would sit like a remorseful culprit until he came back again, occasionally calling upon himself, in a low, reproachful voice, to "stand by!" or growling some remonstrance to "Ed'ard Cuttle my lad," on the want of caution observable in his behaviour.

One of Mr. Toots's hardest trials, however, was of his own seeking. On the approach of the Sunday which was to witness the last of those askings in church of which the captain had spoken, Mr. Toots thus stated his feelings to Susan Nipper.

"Susan," said Mr. Toots, "I am drawn towards the building. The words which cut me off from Miss Dombey for ever will strike upon my ears like a knell, you know, but, upon my word and honour, I feel that I must hear them. Therefore," said Mr. Toots, "will you accompany me to-morrow to the sacred edifice?"

Miss Nipper expressed her readiness to do so, if that would be any satisfaction to Mr. Toots, but besought him to abandon his idea of going.

"Susan," returned Mr. Toots with much solemnity, "before my whiskers began to be observed by anybody but myself, I adored Miss Dombey. While yet a victim to the thralldom of Blimber, I adored Miss Dombey. When I could no longer be kept out of my property, in a legal point of view, and—and accordingly came into it—I adored Miss Dombey. The banns which consign her to Lieutenant Walters, and me to—to Gloom, you know," said Mr.

Toots, after hesitating for a strong expression, "may be dreadful, *will* be dreadful; but I feel that I should wish to hear them spoken. I feel that I should wish to know that the ground was certainly cut from under me, and that I hadn't a hope to cherish, or a—or a leg, in short, to—go upon."

Susan Nipper could only commiserate Mr. Toots's unfortunate condition, and agree, under these circumstances, to accompany him; which she did next morning.

The church Walter had chosen for the purpose was a mouldy old church in a yard, hemmed in by a labyrinth of back-streets and courts,



"AFTER THIS, HE SMOKED FOUR PIPES SUCCESSIVELY IN THE LITTLE PARLOUR BY HIMSELF, AND WAS DISCOVERED CHUCKLING AT THE EXPIRATION OF AS MANY HOURS."

with a little burying-ground round it, and itself buried in a kind of vault formed by the neighbouring houses, and paved with echoing stones. It was a great, dim, shabby pile, with high old oaken pews, among which about a score of

people lost themselves every Sunday; while the clergyman's voice drowsily resounded through the emptiness, and the organ rumbled and rolled as if the church had got the colic, for want of a congregation to keep the wind and damp out.

But so far was this City church from languishing for the company of other churches, that spires were clustered round it, as the masts of shipping cluster on the river. It would have been hard to count them from its steeple-top, they were so many. In almost every yard and blind place near, there was a church. The confusion of bells, when Susan and Mr. Toots betook themselves towards it on the Sunday morning, was deafening. There were twenty churches close together, clamouring for people to come in.

The two stray sheep in question were penned by a beadle in a commodious pew, and, being early, sat for some time counting the congregation, listening to the disappointed bell high up in the tower, or looking at a shabby little old man in the porch behind the screen, who was ringing the same, like the bull in Cock Robin, with his foot in a stirrup. Mr. Toots, after a lengthened survey of the large books on the reading-desk, whispered Miss Nipper that he wondered where the banns were kept, but that young lady merely shook her head and frowned; repelling for the time all approaches of a temporal nature.

Mr. Toots, however, appearing unable to keep his thoughts from the banns, was evidently looking out for them during the whole preliminary portion of the service. As the time for reading them approached, the poor young gentleman manifested great anxiety and trepidation, which was not diminished by the unexpected apparition of the captain in the front row of the gallery. When the clerk handed up a list to the clergyman, Mr. Toots, being then seated, held on by the seat of the pew; but when the names of Walter Gay and Florence Dombey were read aloud as being in the third and last stage of that association, he was so entirely conquered by his feelings as to rush from the church without his hat, followed by the beadle and per-opener, and two gentlemen of the medical profession, who happened to be present; of whom the first named presently returned for that article, informing Miss Nipper in a whisper that she was not to make herself uneasy about the gentleman, as the gentleman said his indisposition was of no consequence.

Miss Nipper, feeling that the eyes of that integral portion of Europe which lost itself weekly among the high-backed pews were upon her, would have been sufficiently embarrassed by this incident, though it had terminated here; the more so, as the captain, in the front row of the gallery, was in a state of unmitigated consciousness which could hardly fail to, express to the congregation, that he had some mysterious

connection with it. But the extreme restlessness of Mr. Toots painfully increased and protracted the delicacy of her situation. That young gentleman, incapable, in his state of mind, of remaining alone in the churchyard, a prey to solitary meditation, and also desirous, no doubt, of testifying his respect for the offices he had in some measure interrupted, suddenly returned—not coming back to the pew, but stationing himself on a free-seat in the aisle, between two elderly females who were in the habit of receiving their portion of a weekly dole of bread then set forth on a shelf in the porch. In this conjunction Mr. Toots remained, greatly disturbing the congregation, who felt it impossible to avoid looking at him, until his feelings overcame him again, when he departed silently and suddenly. Not venturing to trust himself in the church any more, and yet wishing to have some social participation in what was going on there, Mr. Toots was, after this, seen from time to time looking in, with a lorn aspect, at one or other of the windows; and as there were several windows accessible to him from without, and as his restlessness was very great, it not only became difficult to conceive at which window he would appear next, but likewise became necessary, as it were, for the whole congregation to speculate upon the chances of the different windows during the comparative leisure afforded them by the sermon. Mr. Toots's movements in the churchyard were so eccentric, that he seemed generally to defeat all calculation, and to appear, like the conjurer's figure, where he was least expected; and the effect of these mysterious presentations was much increased by its being difficult to him to see in, and easy to everybody else to see out: which occasioned his remaining, every time, longer than might have been expected, with his face close to the glass, until he all at once became aware that all eyes were upon him, and vanished.

These proceedings on the part of Mr. Toots, and the strong individual consciousness of them that was exhibited by the captain, rendered Miss Nipper's position so responsible a one, that she was mightily relieved by the conclusion of the service; and was hardly so affable to Mr. Toots as usual, when he informed her and the captain, on the way back, that now he was sure he had no hope, you know, he felt more comfortable—at least, not exactly more comfortable, but more comfortably and completely miserable.

Swiftly, now, indeed, the time flew by, until it was the evening before the day appointed for the marriage. They were all assembled in the upper room at the Midshipman's, and had no

fear of interruption; for there were no lodgers in the house now, and the Midshipman had it all to himself. They were grave and quiet in the prospect of to-morrow, but moderately cheerful too. Florence, with Walter close beside her, was finishing a little piece of work intended as a parting gift to the captain. The captain was playing cribbage with Mr. Toots. Mr. Toots was taking counsel as to his hand of Susan Nipper. Miss Nipper was giving it with all due secrecy and circumspection. Diogenes was listening, and occasionally breaking out into a gruff, half-smothered fragment of a bark, of which he afterwards seemed half ashamed, as if he doubted having any reason for it.

"Steady, steady!" said the captain to Diogenes; "what's amiss with you? You don't seem easy in your mind to-night, my boy!"

Diogenes wagged his tail, but pricked up his ears immediately afterwards, and gave utterance to another fragment of a bark; for which he apologised to the captain by again wagging his tail.

"It's my opinion, Di," said the captain, looking thoughtfully at his cards, and stroking his chin with his hook, "as you have your doubts of Mrs. Richards; but if you're the animal I take you to be, you'll think better o' that; for her looks is her commission. Now, brother:" to Mr. Toots: "if so be as you're ready, heave ahead."

The captain spoke with all composure and attention to the game, but suddenly his cards dropped out of his hand, his mouth and eyes opened wide, his legs drew themselves up and stuck out in front of his chair, and he sat staring at the door with blank amazement. Looking round upon the company, and seeing that none of them observed him or the cause of his astonishment, the captain recovered himself with a great gasp, struck the table a tremendous blow, cried in a stentorian roar, "Sol Gills ahoy!" and tumbled into the arms of a weather-beaten pea-coat that had come with Polly into the room.

In another moment, Walter was in the arms of the weather-beaten pea-coat. In another moment, Florence was in the arms of the weather-beaten pea-coat. In another moment, Captain Cuttle had embraced Mrs. Richards and Miss Nipper, and was violently shaking hands with Mr. Toots, exclaiming, as he waved his hook above his head, "Hooroar, my lad, hooroar!" To which Mr. Toots, wholly at a loss to account for these proceedings, replied with great politeness, "Certainly, Captain Gills, whatever you think proper!"

The weather-beaten pea-coat, and a no less weather-beaten cap and comforter, belonging to

it, turned from the captain and from Florence back to Walter, and sounds came from the weather-beaten pea-coat, cap, and comforter, as of an old man sobbing underneath them; while the shaggy sleeves clasped Walter tight. During this pause there was an universal silence, and the captain polished his nose with great diligence. But when the pea-coat, cap, and comforter lifted themselves up again, Florence gently moved towards them; and she and Walter, taking them off, disclosed the old instrument-maker, a little thinner and more careworn than of old, in his old Welsh wig and his old coffee-coloured coat and basket buttons, with his old infallible chronometer ticking away in his pocket.

"Chock-full o' science," said the radiant captain, "as ever he was! Sol Gills, Sol Gills, what have you been up to for this many a long day, my ould boy?"

"I'm half blind, Ned," said the old man, "and almost deaf and dumb with joy."

"His wery voice," said the captain, looking round with an exultation to which even his face could hardly render justice—"his wery voice as chock-full o' science as ever it was! Sol Gills, lay to, my lad, upon your own wines and fig-trees, like a taut old patriark as you are, and overhaul them there adventures o' yourn, in your own formilior voice. 'Tis the voice," said the captain impressively, and announcing a quotation with his hook, "of the sluggard, I heerd him com-plain, you have woke 'me too soon, I must slumber again. Scatter his ene-mies, and make 'em fall!"

The captain sat down with the air of a man who had happily expressed the feeling of everybody present, and immediately rose again to present Mr. Toots, who was much disconcerted by the arrival of anybody appearing to prefer a claim to the name of Gills.

"Although," stammered Mr. Toots, "I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir, before you were—you were——"

"Lost to sight, to memory dear," suggested the captain in a low voice.

"Exactly so, Captain Gills!" assented Mr. Toots. "Although I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, Mr.—Mr. Sols," said Toots, hitting on that name in the inspiration of a bright idea, "before that happened, I have the greatest pleasure, I assure you, in—you know, in knowing you. I hope," said Mr. Toots, "that you're as well as can be expected."

With these courteous words, Mr. Toots sat down blushing and chuckling.

The old instrument-maker, seated in a corner between Walter and Florence, and nodding at

Polly, who was looking on, all smiles and delight, answered the captain thus:

"Ned Cuttle, my dear boy, although I have heard something of the changes of events here, from my pleasant friend there—What a pleasant face she has to be sure, to welcome a wanderer home!" said the old man, breaking off, and rubbing his hands in his old dreamy way.

"Hear him!" cried the captain gravely. "This woman as seduces all mankind: For which," aside to Mr. Toots, "you'll overhaul your Adam and Eve, brother."

"I shall make a point of doing so, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots.

"Although I have heard something of the changes of events from her," resumed the instrument-maker, taking his old spectacles from his pocket, and putting them on his forehead in his old manner, "they are so great and unexpected, and I am so overpowered by the sight of my dear boy, and by the—" glancing at the downcast eyes of Florence, and not attempting to finish the sentence—"that I—I can't say much to-night. But, my dear Ned Cuttle, why didn't you write?"

The astonishment depicted in the captain's features positively frightened Mr. Toots, whose eyes were quite fixed by it, so that he could not withdraw them from his face.

"Write!" echoed the captain. "Write, Sol Gills!"

"Ay," said the old man, "either to Barbadoes, or Jamaica, or Demerara. That was what I asked."

"What you asked, Sol Gills!" repeated the captain.

"Ay," said the old man. "Don't you know, Ned? Sure you have not forgotten? Every time I wrote to you."

The captain took off his glazed hat, hung it on his hook, and smoothing his hair from behind with his hand, sat gazing at the group around him: a perfect image of wondering resignation.

"You don't appear to understand me, Ned!" observed old Sol.

"Sol Gills," returned the captain, after staring at him and the rest for a long time without speaking, "I'm gone about and adrift. Pay out a word or two respecting them adventures, will you? Can't I bring up, nohows? nohows?" said the captain, ruminating, and staring all round.

"You know, Ned," said Sol Gills, "why I left here. Did you open my packet, Ned?"

"Why, ay, ay," said the captain. "To be sure, I opened the packet."

"And read it?" said the old man.

"And read it," answered the captain, eyeing him attentively, and proceeding to quote it from memory. "'My dear Ned Cuttle, when I left home for the West Indies in forlorn search of intelligence of my dear—' There he sits! There's Wal'ri!" said the captain, as if he were relieved by getting hold of anything that was real and indisputable.

"Well, Ned. Now attend a moment!" said the old man. "When I wrote first—that was from Barbadoes—I said that though you would receive that letter long before the year was out, I should be glad if you would open the packet, as it explained the reason of my going away. Very good, Ned. When I wrote the second, third, and perhaps the fourth times—that was from Jamaica—I said I was in just the same state, couldn't rest, and couldn't come away from that part of the world, without knowing that my boy was lost or saved. When I wrote next—that, I think, was from Demerara, wasn't it?"

"That he thinks was from Demerara, warn't it?" said the captain, looking hopelessly round.

"—I said," proceeded old Sol, "that still there was no certain information got yet. That I found many captains and others, in that part of the world, who had known me for years, and who assisted me with a passage here and there, and for whom I was able, now and then, to do a little in return in my own craft. That every one was sorry for me, and seemed to take a sort of interest in my wanderings; and that I began to think it would be my fate to cruise about in search of tidings of my boy until I died."

"Began to think as how he was a scientific flying Dutchman!" said the captain, as before, and with great seriousness.

"But when the news came one day, Ned,—that was to Barbadoes, after I got back there,—that a China trader home-ard bound had been spoke, that had my boy aboard, then, Ned, I took passage in the next ship, and came home; and arrived at home to-night to find it true, thank God!" said the old man devoutly.

The captain, after bowing his head with great reverence, stared all round the circle, beginning with Mr. Toots, and ending with the instrument-maker: then gravely said:

"Sol Gills! The observation as I'm a-going to make is calc'lated to blow every stitch of sail as you can carry clean out of the bolt-ropes, and bring you on your beam-ends with a lurch. Not one of them letters was ever delivered to Ed'ard Cuttle. Not one o' them letters," repeated the captain, to make his declaration the more solemn and impressive, "was ever delivered unto Ed'ard Cuttle, mariner, of England, as lives at

home at ease, and doth improve each shining hour!"

"And posted by my own hand! And directed by my own hand, Number Nine, Brig Place!" exclaimed old Sol.

The colour all went out of the captain's face, and all came back again in a glow.

"What do you mean, Sol Gills, my friend, by Number Nine, Brig Place?" inquired the captain.

"Mean?—Your lodgings, Ned," returned the old man. "Mrs. What's-her-name! I shall forget my own name next, but I am behind the present time—I always was, you recollect—and very much confused. Mrs. —"

"Sol Gills!" said the captain, as if he were putting the most improbable case in the world, "it ain't the name of MacStinger as you're a trying to remember?"

"Of course it is!" exclaimed the instrument-maker. "To be sure, Ned. Mrs. MacStinger!"

Captain Cuttle, whose eyes were now as wide open as they could be, and the knobs upon whose face were perfectly luminous, gave a long shrill whistle of a most melancholy sound, and stood gazing at everybody in a state of speechlessness.

"Overhaul that there again, Sol Gills, will you be so kind?" he said at last.

"All these letters," returned Uncle Sol, beating time with the forefinger of his right hand upon the palm of his left, with a steadiness and distinctness that might have done honour even to the infallible chronometer in his pocket, "I posted with my own hand, and directed with my own hand, to Captain Cuttle, at Mrs. MacStinger's, Number Nine, Brig Place."

The captain took his glazed hat off his hook, looked into it, put it on, and sat down.

"Why, friends all," said the captain, staring round in the last state of discomfiture, "I cut and run from there!"

"And no one knew where you were gone, Captain Cuttle?" cried Walter hastily.

"Bless your heart, Wal'r," said the captain, shaking his head, "she'd never have allowed of my coming to take charge of this here property. Nothing could be done but cut and run. Lord love you, Wal'r," said the captain, "you've only seen her in a calm! But see her when her angry passions rise—and make a note on!"

"I'd give it her!" remarked the Nipper softly.

"Would you, do you think, my dear?" returned the captain with feeble admiration.

"Well, my dear, it does you credit. But there ain't no wild animal I wouldn't sooner face myself. I only got my chest away by means of

a friend as nobody's a match for. It was no good sending any letter there. *She* wouldn't take in any letter, bless you," said the captain, "under them circumstances! Why, you could hardly make it worth a man's while to be the postman!"

"Then it's pretty clear, Captain Cuttle, that all of us, and you and Uncle Sol especially," said Walter, "may thank Mrs. MacStinger for no small anxiety."

The general obligation in this wise to the determined relict of the late Mr. MacStinger was so apparent, that the captain did not contest the point; but being in some measure ashamed of his position, though nobody dwelt upon the subject, and Walter especially avoided it, remembering the last conversation he and the captain had held together respecting it, he remained under a cloud for nearly five minutes—an extraordinary period for him—when that sun, his face, broke out once more, shining on all beholders with extraordinary brilliancy; and he fell into a fit of shaking hands with everybody over and over again.

At an early hour, but not before Uncle Sol and Walter had questioned each other at some length about their voyages and dangers, they all, except Walter, vacated Florence's room, and went down to the parlour. Here they were soon afterwards joined by Walter, who told them Florence was a little sorrowful and heavy-hearted, and had gone to bed. Though they could not have disturbed her with their voices down there, they all spoke in a whisper after this: and each, in his different way, felt very lovingly and gently towards Walter's fair young bride; and a long explanation there was of everything relating to her, for the satisfaction of Uncle Sol; and very sensible Mr. Toots was of the delicacy with which Walter made his name and services important, and his presence necessary to their little council.

"Mr. Toots," said Walter, on parting with him at the house-door, "we shall see each other to-morrow morning?"

"Lieutenant Walters," returned Mr. Toots, grasping his hand fervently, "I shall certainly be present."

"This is the last night we shall meet for a long time—the last night we may ever meet," said Walter. "Such a noble heart as yours must feel, I think, when another heart is bound to it. I hope you know that I am very grateful to you?"

"Walters," replied Mr. Toots, quite touched, "I should be glad to feel that you had reason to be so."

"Florence," said Walter, "on this last night of her bearing her own name, has made me promise—it was only just now, when you left us together—that I would tell you, with her dear love—"

Mr. Toots laid his hand upon the door-post, and his eyes upon his hand.

"—With her dear love," said Walter, "that she can never have a friend whom she will value above you. That the recollection of your true consideration for her always, can never be forgotten by her. That she remembers you in her prayers to-night, and hopes that you will think of her when she is far away. Shall I say anything for you?"

"Say, Walters," replied Mr. Toots indistinctly, "that I shall think of her every day, but never without feeling happy to know that she is married to the man she loves, and who loves her. Say, if you please, that I am sure her husband deserves her—even her!—and that I am glad of her choice."

Mr. Toots got more distinct as he came to these last words, and raising his eyes from the door-post, said them stoutly. He then shook Walter's hand again with a fervour that Walter was not slow to return, and started homeward.

Mr. Toots was accompanied by the Chicken, whom he had of late brought with him every evening, and left in the shop, with an idea that unforeseen circumstances might arise from without, in which the prowess of that distinguished character would be of service to the Midshipman. The Chicken did not appear to be in a particularly good humour on this occasion. Either the gas-lamps were treacherous, or he cocked his eye in a hideous manner, and likewise distorted his nose, when Mr. Toots, crossing the road, looked back over his shoulder at the room where Florence slept. On the road home, he was more demonstrative of aggressive intentions against the other foot-passengers than comported with a professor of the peaceful art of self-defence. Arrived at home, instead of leaving Mr. Toots in his apartments when he had escorted him thither, he remained before him weighing his white hat in both hands by the brim, and twitching his head and nose (both of which had been many times broken, and but indifferently repaired), with an air of decided disrespect.

His patron, being much engaged with his own thoughts, did not observe this for some time; nor, indeed, until the Chicken, determined not to be overlooked, had made divers clucking sounds, with his tongue and teeth, to attract attention.

"Now, master," said the Chicken doggedly, when he at length caught Mr. Toots's eye, "I want to know whether this here gammon is to finish it, or whether you're a-going in to win?"

"Chicken," returned Mr. Toots, "explain yourself."

"Why, then, here's all about it, master," said the Chicken. "I ain't a-cove to chuck a word away. Here's wot it is. Are any on 'em to be doubled up?"

When the Chicken put this question he dropped his hat, made a dodge and a feint with his left hand, hit a supposed enemy a violent blow with his right, shook his head smartly, and recovered himself.

"Come, master," said the Chicken, "is it to be gammon or pluck? Which?"

"Chicken," returned Mr. Toots, "your expressions are coarse, and your meaning is obscure."

"Why, then, I tell you what, master," said the Chicken. "This is where it is. It's mean."

"What is mean, Chicken?" asked Mr. Toots.

"It is," said the Chicken, with a frightful corrugation of his broken nose. "There! Now, master! Wot! Wen you could go and blow on this here match to the stiff 'un;" by which depreciatory appellation it has been since supposed that the Game One intended to signify Mr. Dombey; "and when you could knock the winner and all the kit of 'em dead out of wind and time, are you going to give in? To *give in*?" said the Chicken with contemptuous emphasis. "Wy, it's mean!"

"Chicken," said Mr. Toots severely, "you're a perfect vulture! Your sentiments are atrocious."

"My sentiments is game and fancy, master," returned the Chicken. "That's wot my sentiments is. I can't abear a meanness. I'm afore the public, I'm to be heard on at the bar of the Little Helephant, and no Gov'nor o' mine musn't go and do what's mean. Wy, it's mean," said the Chicken with increased expression. "That's where it is. It's mean."

"Chicken!" said Mr. Toots, "you disgust me."

"Master," returned the Chicken, putting on his hat, "there's a pale on us, then. Come! Here's a offer! You've spoke to me more than once't or twice't about the public line. Never mind! Give me a fifty-punnote to-morrow, and let me go."

"Chicken," returned Mr. Toots, "after the odious sentiments you have expressed, I shall be glad to part on such terms."

"Done, then," said the Chicken. "It's a

bargain. This here conduct of yours won't suit my book, master. Wy, it's mean," said the Chicken; who seemed equally unable to get beyond that point, and to stop short of it. "That's where it is; it's mean!"

So Mr. Toots and the Chicken agreed to part on this incompatibility of moral perception; and Mr. Toots, lying down to sleep, dreamed happily of Florence, who had thought of him as her friend upon the last night of her maiden life, and sent him her dear love,

CHAPTER LVII.

ANOTHER WEDDING.

MR. SOWNDS the beadle, and Mrs. Miff the pew-opener, are early at their posts in the fine church where Mr. Dombey was married. A yellow-faced old gentleman from India is going to take unto himself a young wife this morning, and six carriages full of company are expected, and Mrs. Miff has been informed that the yellow-faced old gentleman could pave the road to church with diamonds, and hardly miss them.

The nuptial benediction is to be a superior one, proceeding from a very reverend, a dean, and the lady is to be given away, as an extraordinary present, by somebody who comes express from the Horse Guards.

Mrs. Miff is more intolerant of common people this morning than she generally is; and she has always strong opinions on that subject, for it is associated with free sittings. Mrs. Miff is not a student of political economy (she thinks the science is connected with Dissenters; "Baptists or Wesleyans, or some o' them," she says), but she can never understand what business your common folks have to be married. "Drat 'em," says Mrs. Miff, "you read the same things over 'em, and instead of sovereigns get sixpences!"

Mr. Sownds the beadle is more liberal than Mrs. Miff—but then he is not a pew-opener. "It must be done, ma'am," he says. "We must marry 'em. We must have our national schools to walk at the head of, and we must have our standing armies. We must marry 'em, ma'am," says Mr. Sownds, "and keep the country going."

Mr. Sownds is sitting on the steps, and Mrs. Miff is dusting in the church, when a young couple, plainly dressed, come in. The mortified bonnet of Mrs. Miff is sharply turned towards

them, for she espies in this early visit indications of a runaway match. But they don't want to be married—"only," says the gentleman, "to walk round the church." And, as he slips a gentle compliment into the palm of Mrs. Miff, her vinegary face relaxes, and her mortified bonnet and her spare dry figure dip and crackle.

Mrs. Miff resumes her dusting and plumps up her cushions—for the yellow-faced old gentleman is reported to have tender knees—but keeps her glazed pew-opening eye on the young couple who are walking round the church. "Ahem!" coughs Mrs. Miff, whose cough is drier than the hay in any hassock in her charge, "you'll come to us one of these mornings, my dears, unless I'm much mistaken!"

They are looking at a tablet on the wall, erected to the memory of some one dead. They are a long way off from Mrs. Miff, but Mrs. Miff can see with half an eye how she is leaning on his arm, and how his head is bent down over her. "Well, well," says Mrs. Miff, "you might do worse. For you're a tidy pair!"

There is nothing personal in Mrs. Miff's remark. She merely speaks of stock-in-trade. She is hardly more curious in couples than in coffins. She is such a spare, straight, dry old lady—such a pew of a woman—that you should find as many individual sympathies in a chip. Mr. Sownds, now, who is fleshy, and has scarlet in his coat, is of a different temperament. He says, as they stand upon the steps watching the young couple away, that she has a pretty figure, hasn't she? and, as well as he could see (for she held her head down coming out), an uncommon pretty face. "Altogether, Mrs. Miff," says Mr. Sownds with a relish, "she is what you may call a rosebud."

Mrs. Miff assents with a spare nod of her mortified bonnet; but approves of this so little, that she inwardly resolves she wouldn't be the wife of Mr. Sownds for any money he could give her, beadle as he is.

And what are the young couple saying as they leave the church, and go out at the gate?

"Dear Walter, thank you! I can go away now happy."

"And when we come back, Florence, we will come and see his grave again."

Florence lifts her eyes, so bright with tears, to his kind face; and clasps her disengaged hand on that other modest little hand which clasps his arm.

"It is very early, Walter, and the streets are almost empty yet. Let us walk."

"But you will be so tired, my love."

"Oh no! I was very tired the first time that

we ever walked together, but I shall not be so to-day."

And thus—not much changed—she, as innocent and earnest-hearted—he, as frank, as hopeful, and more proud of her—Florence and Walter, on their bridal morning, walk through the streets together.

Not even in that childish walk of long ago were they so far removed from all the world about them as to-day. The childish feet of long ago did not tread such enchanted ground as theirs do now. The confidence and love of children may be given many times, and will spring up in many places; but the woman's heart of Florence, with its undivided treasure, can be yielded only once, and, under slight or change, can only droop and die.

They take the streets that are the quietest, and do not go near that in which her old home stands. It is a fair, warm summer morning, and the sun shines on them as they walk towards the darkening mist that overspreads the City. Riches are uncovering in shops; jewels, gold, and silver flash in the goldsmiths' sunny windows; and great houses cast a stately shade upon them as they pass. But through the light, and through the shade, they go on lovingly together, lost to everything around; thinking of no other riches, and no prouder home, than they have now in one another.

Gradually they come into the darker, narrower streets, where the sun, now yellow, and now red, is seen through the mist, only at street corners, and in small open spaces where there is a tree, or one of the innumerable churches, or a paved way and a flight of steps, or a curious little patch of garden, or a burying-ground, where the few tombs and tombstones are almost black. Lovingly and trustfully, through all the narrow yards and alleys and the shady streets, Florence goes, clinging to his arm, to be his wife.

Her heart beats quicker now, for Walter tells her that their church is very near. They pass a few great stacks of warehouses, with waggons at the doors, and busy carmen stopping up the way—but Florence does not see or hear them—and then the air is quiet, and the day is darkened, and she is trembling in a church which has a strange smell like a cellar.

The shabby little old man, ringer of the disappointed bell, is standing in the porch, and has put his hat in the font—for he is quite at home there, being sexton. He ushers them into an old, brown, panelled, dusty vestry, like a corner cupboard with the shelves taken out; where the wormy registers diffuse a smell like faded

snuff, which has set the tearful Nipper sneezing.

Youthful, and how beautiful, the young bride looks in this old dusty place, with no kindred object near her but her husband. There is a dusty old clerk, who keeps a sort of evaporated news shop underneath an archway opposite, behind a perfect fortification of posts. There is a dusty old pew-opener who only keeps herself, and finds that quite enough to do. There is a dusty old beadle (these are Mr. Toots's beadle and pew-opener of last Sunday), who has something to do with a Worshipful Company who have got a Hall in the next yard, with a stained-glass window in it that no mortal ever saw. There are dusty wooden ledges and cornices poked in and out over the altar, and over the screen and round the gallery, and over the inscription about what the Master and Wardens of the Worshipful Company did in one thousand six hundred and ninety-four. There are dusty old sounding-boards over the pulpit and reading-desk, looking like lids to be let down on the officiating ministers, in case of their giving offence. There is every possible provision for the accommodation of dust, except in the churchyard, where the facilities in that respect are very limited.

The Captain, Uncle Sol, and Mr. Toots are come; the clergyman is putting on his surplice in the vestry, while the clerk walks round him, blowing the dust off it; and the bride and bridegroom stand before the altar. There is no bridesmaid, unless Susan Nipper is one; and no better father than Captain Cuttle. A man with a wooden leg, chewing a faint apple and carrying a blue bag in his hand, looks in to see what is going on; but, finding it nothing entertaining, stumps off again, and pegs his way among the echoes out of doors.

No gracious ray of light is seen to fall on Florence, kneeling at the altar with her timid head bowed down. The morning luminary is built out, and don't shine there. There is a meagre tree outside, where the sparrows are chirping a little; and there is a blackbird in an eyelet-hole of sun in a dyer's garret, over against the window, who whistles loudly whilst the service is performing; and there is the man with the wooden leg stumping away. The amens of the dusty clerk appear, like Macbeth's, to stick in his throat a little; but Captain Cuttle helps him out, and does it with so much good-will that he interpolates three entirely new responses of that word, never introduced into the service before.

They are married, and have signed their

names in one of the old sneezy registers, and the clergyman's surplice is restored to the dust, and the clergyman is gone home. In a dark corner of the dark church, Florence has turned to Susan Nipper, and is weeping in her arms. Mr. Toots's eyes are red. The captain lubricates his nose. Uncle Sol has pulled down his spectacles from his forehead, and walked out to the door.

"God bless you, Susan; dearest Susan! If you ever can bear witness to the love I have

for Walter, and the reason that I have to love him, do it for his sake. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

They have thought it better not to go back to the Midshipman, but to part so. A coach is waiting for them near at hand.

Miss Nipper cannot speak; she only sobs and chokes, and hugs her mistress. Mr. Toots advances, urges her to cheer up, and takes charge of her. Florence gives him her hand—gives him, in the fulness of her heart, her lips—



"WY, IT'S MEAN. . . . THAT'S WHERE IT IS. IT'S MEAN!"

kisses Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle, and is borne away by her young husband.

But Susan cannot bear that Florence should go away with a mournful recollection of her. She had meant to be so different, that she reproaches herself bitterly. Intent on making one last effort to redeem her character, she breaks from Mr. Toots, and runs away to find the coach, and show a parting smile. The captain, divining her object, sets off after her; for he feels it his duty also to dismiss them with a

cheer, if possible. Uncle Sol and Mr. Toots are left behind together, outside the church, to wait for them.

The coach is gone, but the street is steep and narrow, and blocked up, and Susan can see it at a stand-still in the distance, she is sure. Captain Cuttle follows her as she flies down the hill, and waves his glazed hat as a general signal, which may attract the right coach, and may not.

Susan outstrips the captain, and comes up

with it. She looks in at the window, sees Walter, with the gentle face beside him, and claps her hands and screams:

"Miss Floy, my darling! look at me! We are all so happy now, dear! One more good-bye, my precious, one more!"

How Susan does it, she don't know, but she reaches to the window, kisses her, and has her arms about her neck, in a moment.

"We are all so—so happy now, my dear Miss Floy!" says Susan, with a suspicious catching in her breath. "You, you won't be angry with me now. Now *will* you?"

"Angry, Susan!"

"No, no; I am sure you won't. I say you won't, my pet, my dearest!" exclaims Susan; "and here's the captain, too—your friend the captain, you know—to say good-bye once more!"

"Hooroar, my Heart's Delight!" vociferates the captain, with a countenance of strong emotion. "Hooroar, Wal'r, my lad! Hooroar! Hooroar!"

What with the young husband at one window, and the young wife at the other; the captain hanging on at this door, and Susan Nipper holding fast by that; the coach obliged to go on, whether it will or no, and all the other carts and coaches turbulent because it hesitates; there never was so much confusion on four wheels. But Susan Nipper gallantly maintains her point. She keeps a smiling face upon her mistress, smiling through her tears, until the last. Even when she is left behind, the captain continues to appear and disappear at the door crying, "Hooroar, my lad! Hooroar, my Heart's Delight!" with his shirt collar in a violent state of agitation, until it is hopeless to attempt to keep up with the coach any longer. Finally, when the coach is gone, Susan Nipper, being rejoined by the captain, falls into a state of insensibility, and is taken into a baker's shop to recover.

Uncle Sol and Mr. Toots wait patiently in the churchyard, sitting on the coping-stone of the railings, until Captain Cuttle and Susan come back. Neither being at all desirous to, speak, or to be spoken to, they are excellent company, and quite satisfied. When they all arrive again at the little Midshipman, and sit down to breakfast, nobody can touch a morsel. Captain Cuttle makes a feint of being voracious about toast, but gives it up as a swindle. Mr. Toots says, after breakfast, he will come back in the evening; and goes wandering about the town all day, with a vague sensation upon him as if he hadn't been to bed for a fortnight.

There is a strange charm in the house, and in the room, in which they have been used, to be together, and out of which so much is gone. It aggravates, and yet it soothes, the sorrow of the separation. Mr. Toots tells Susan Nipper, when he comes at night, that he hasn't been so wretched all day long, and yet he likes it. He confides in Susan Nipper, being alone with her, and tells her what his feelings were when she gave him that candid opinion as to the probability of Miss Dombey's ever loving him. In the vein of confidence engendered by these common recollections, and their tears, Mr. Toots proposes that they shall go out together, and buy something for supper. Miss Nipper assenting, they buy a good many little things; and, with the aid of Mrs. Richards, set the supper out quite showily before the captain and old Sol came home.

The captain and old Sol have been on board the ship, and have established Di there, and have seen the chests put aboard. They have much to tell about the popularity of Walter, and the comforts he will have about him, and the quiet way in which it seems he has been working early and late, to make his cabin what the captain calls a "pictor," to surprise his little wife. "A admiral's cabin, mind you," says the captain, "ain't more trim."

But one of the captain's chief delights is, that he knows the big watch, and the sugar-tongs, and teaspoons are on board; and again and again he murmurs to himself, "Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, you never shaped a better course in your life than when you made that there little property over jintly. You see how the land bore, Ed'ard," says the captain, "and it does you credit, my lad."

The old instrument-maker is more distraught and misty than he used to be, and takes the marriage and the parting very much to heart. But he is greatly comforted by having his old ally, Ned Cuttle, at his side; and he sits down to supper with a grateful and contented face.

"My boy has been preserved and thrives," says old Sol Gills, rubbing his hands. "What right have I to be otherwise than thankful and happy?"

The captain, who has not yet taken his seat at the table, but who has been fidgeting about for some time, and now stands hesitating in his place, looks doubtfully at Mr. Gills, and says:

"Sol! There's the last bottle of the old madeira down below. Would you wish to have it up to-night, my boy, and drink to Wal'r and his wife?"

The instrument-maker, looking wistfully at

the captain, puts his hand into the breast pocket of his coffee-coloured coat, brings forth his pocket-book, and takes a letter out.

"To Mr. Dombey," says the old man. "From Walter. To be sent in three weeks' time. I'll read it."

"Sir. I am married to your daughter. She is gone with me upon a distant voyage. To be devoted to her is to have no claim on her or you, but God knows that I am.

"Why, loving her beyond all earthly things, I have yet, without remorse, united her to the uncertainties and dangers of my life, I will not say to you. You know why, and you are her father.

"Do not reproach her. She has never reproached you.

"I do not think or hope that you will ever forgive me. There is nothing I expect less. But if an hour should come when it will comfort you to believe that Florence has some one ever near her, the great charge of whose life is to cancel her remembrance of past sorrow, I solemnly assure you, you may, in that hour, rest in that belief."

Solomon puts back the letter carefully in his pocket-book, and puts back his pocket-book in his coat.

"We won't drink the last bottle of the old madeira yet, Ned," says the old man thoughtfully. "Not yet."

"Not yet," assents the captain. "No. Not yet."

Susan and Mr. Toots are of the same opinion. After a silence they all sit down to supper, and drink to the young husband and wife in something else; and the last bottle of the old madeira still remains among its dust and cobwebs, undisturbed.

A few days have elapsed, and a stately ship is out at sea, spreading its white wings to the favouring wind.

Upon the deck, image to the roughest man on board of something that is graceful, beautiful, and harmless—something that it is good and pleasant to have there, and that should make the voyage prosperous—is Florence. It is night, and she and Walter sit alone, watching the solemn path of light upon the sea between them and the moon.

At length she cannot see it plainly, for the tears that fill her eyes; and then she lays her head down on his breast, and puts her arms around his neck, saying, "Oh, Walter, dearest love, I am so happy!"

Her husband holds her to his heart, and they

are very quiet, and the stately ship goes on serenely.

"As I hear the sea," says Florence, "and sit watching it, it brings so many days into my mind. It makes me think so much——"

"Of Paul, my love. I know it does."

Of Paul and Walter. And the voices in the waves are always whispering to Florence, in their ceaseless murmuring, of love—of love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of this world, or by the end of time, but ranging still beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away!

CHAPTER LVIII.

AFTER A LAPSE.

THE sea had ebbed and flowed through a whole year. Through a whole year the winds and clouds had come and gone; the ceaseless work of Time had been performed, in storm and sunshine. Through a whole year the tides of human chance and change had set in their allotted courses. Through a whole year the famous House of Dombey and Son had fought a fight for life, against cross accidents, doubtful rumours, unsuccessful ventures, unpropitious times, and, most of all, against the infatuation of its head, who would not contract its enterprises by a hair's breadth, and would not listen to a word of warning that the ship he strained so hard against the storm was weak, and could not bear it.

The year was out, and the Great House was down.

One summer afternoon; a year, wanting some odd days, after the marriage in the City church; there was a buzz and whisper upon 'Change of a great failure. A certain cold, proud man, well known there, was not there, nor was he represented there. Next day it was noised abroad that Dombey and Son had stopped, and next night there was a list of bankrupts published, headed by that name.

The world was very busy now, in sooth, and had a deal to say. It was an innocently credulous and a much ill-used world. It was a world in which there was no other sort of bankruptcy whatever. There were no conspicuous people in it, trading far and wide on rotten banks of religion, patriotism, virtue, honour. There was no amount worth mentioning of mere paper in circulation, on which anybody lived pretty hand-

somely, promising to pay great sums of goodness with no effects. There were no shortcomings anywhere, in anything but money. The world was very angry indeed; and the people especially who, in a worse world, might have been supposed to be bankrupt traders themselves in shows and pretences, were observed to be mightily indignant.

Here was a new inducement to dissipation presented to that sport of circumstances, Mr. Perch the messenger! It was apparently the fate of Mr. Perch to be always waking up, and finding himself famous. He had but yesterday, as one might say, subsided into private life from the celebrity of the elopement and the events that followed it; and now he was made a more important man than ever by the bankruptcy. Gliding from his bracket in the outer office, where he now sat, watching the strange faces of accountants and others, who quickly superseded nearly all the old clerks, Mr. Perch had but to show himself in the court outside, or, at farthest, in the bar of the King's Arms, to be asked a multitude of questions, almost certain to include that interesting question, what would he take to drink? Then would Mr. Perch descant upon the hours of acute uneasiness he and Mrs. Perch had suffered out at Balls Pond, when they first suspected "things was going wrong." Then would Mr. Perch relate to gaping listeners, in a low voice, as if the corpse of the deceased House were lying unburied in the next room, how Mrs. Perch had first come to surmise that things *were* going wrong by hearing him (Perch) moaning in his sleep, "Twelve and ninepence in the pound, twelve and ninepence in the pound!" Which act of somnambulism he supposed to have originated in the impression made upon him by the change in Mr. Dombey's face. Then would he inform them how he had once said, "Might I make so bold as ask, sir, are you unhappy in your mind?" and how Mr. Dombey had replied, "My faithful Perch—but no, it cannot be!" and with that had struck his hand upon his forehead, and said, "Leave me, Perch!" Then, in short, would Mr. Perch, a victim to his position, tell all manner of lies; affecting himself to tears by those that were of a moving nature, and really believing that the inventions of yesterday had, on repetition, a sort of truth about them to-day.

Mr. Perch always closed these conferences by meekly remarking, That, of course, whatever his suspicions might have been, (as if he had ever had any!) it wasn't for *him* to betray his trust, was it? Which sentiment (there never being any creditors present) was received as doing great honour to his feelings. Thus, he gene-

rally brought away a soothed conscience, and left an agreeable intpression behind him, when he returned to his bracket: again to sit watching the strange faces of the accountants and others, making so free with the great mysteries, the Books; or now and then to go on tiptoe into Mr. Dombey's empty room, and stir the fire; or to take an airing at the door, and have a little more doleful chat with any straggler whom he knew; or to propitiate, with various small attentions, the head accountant: from whom Mr. Perch had expectations of a messengership in a Fire Office, when the affairs of the House should be wound up.

To Major Bagstock the bankruptcy was quite a calamity. The major was not a sympathetic character—his attention being wholly concentrated on J. B.—nor was he a man subject to lively emotions, except in the physical regards of gasping and choking. But he had so paraded his friend Dombey at the club; had so flourished him at the heads of the members in general, and so put them down by continual assertion of his riches; that the club, being but human, was delighted to retort upon the major, by asking him, with a show of great concern, whether this tremendous smash had been at all expected, and how his friend Dombey bore it. To such questions, the major, waxing very purple, would reply that it was a bad world, sir, altogether; that Joey knew a thing or two, but had been done, sir, done like an infant; that if you had foretold this, sir, to J. Bagstock, when he went abroad with Dombey, and was chasing that vagabond up and down France, J. Bagstock would have pooh-poohed you—would have pooh-poohed you, sir, by the Lord! That Joe had been deceived, sir, taken in, hoodwinked, blindfolded, but was broad awake again and staring; inso-much, sir, that if Joe's father were to rise up from the grave to-morrow, he wouldn't trust the old blade with a penny piece, but would tell him that his son Josh was too old a soldier to be done again, sir. That he was a suspicious, crabbed, cranky, used-up, J. B. infidel, sir; and that if it were consistent with the dignity of a rough and tough old major of the old school, who had had the honour of being personally known to, and commended by, their late Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Kent and York, to retire to a tub and live in it, by Gad! sir, he'd have a tub in Pall Mall to-morrow, to show his contempt for mankind!

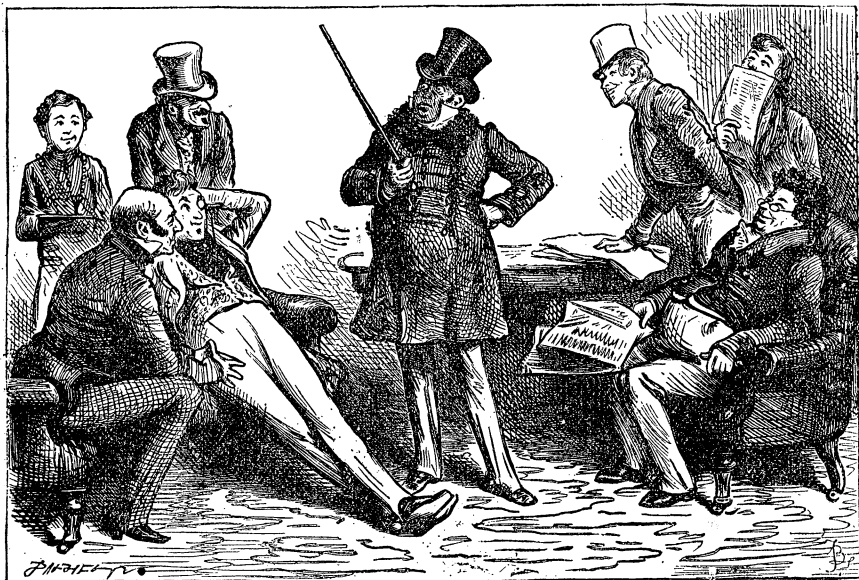
Of all this, and many variations of the same tune, the major would deliver himself with so many apoplectic symptoms, such rollings of his head, and such violent growls of ill-usage and

resentment, that the younger members of the club surmised he had invested money in his friend Dombey's House, and lost it; though the older soldiers and deeper dogs, who knew Joe better, wouldn't hear of such a thing. The unfortunate native, expressing no opinion, suffered dreadfully; not merely in his moral feelings, which were regularly fusilladed by the major every hour in the day, and riddled through and through, but in his sensitiveness to bodily knocks and bumps, which was kept continually on the stretch. For six entire weeks after the bank-

ruptcy, this miserable foreigner lived in a rainy season of bootjacks and brushes.

Mrs. Chick had three ideas upon the subject of the terrible reverse. The first was, that she could not understand it. The second, that her brother had not made an effort. The third, that if she had been invited to dinner on the day of that first party, it never would have happened; and that she had said so at the time.

Nobody's opinion stayed the misfortune, lightened it, or made it heavier. It was understood that the affairs of the House were to be wound



"JOE HAD BEEN DECEIVED, SIR, TAKEN-IN, HOODWINKED, BLINDFOLDED, BUT WAS BROAD AWAKE AGAIN, AND STARING."

up as they best could be; that Mr. Dombey freely resigned everything he had, and asked for no favour from any one. That any resumption of the business was out of the question, as he would listen to no friendly negotiation having that compromise in view; that he had relinquished every post of trust or distinction he had held, as a man respected among merchants; that he was dying, according to some; that he was going melancholy mad, according to others; that he was a broken man, according to all.

The clerks dispersed after holding a little dinner of condolence among themselves, which

was enlivened by comic singing, and went off admirably. Some took places abroad, and some engaged in other houses at home; some looked up relations in the country, for whom they suddenly remembered they had a particular affection, and some advertised for employment in the newspapers; Mr. Perch alone remained of all the late establishment, sitting on his bracket looking at the accountants, or starting off it, to propitiate the head accountant, who was to get him into the Fire Office. The counting-house soon got to be dirty and neglected. The principal slipper and dog's-collar seller, at the corner

of the court, would have doubted the propriety of throwing up his forefinger to the brim of his hat any more, if Mr. Dombey had appeared there now; and the ticket porter, with his hands under his white apron, moralised good sound morality about ambition, which (he observed) was not, in his opinion, made to rhyme to perfection, for nothing.

Mr. Morfin, the hazel-eyed bachelor, with the hair and whiskers sprinkled with grey, was perhaps the only person within the atmosphere of the House—its head, of course, excepted—who was heartily and deeply affected by the disaster that had befallen it. He had treated Mr. Dombey with due respect and deference through many years, but he had never disguised his natural character, or meanly truckled to him, or pampered his master passion for the advancement of his own purposes. He had, therefore, no self-disrespect to avenge; no long-tightened springs to release with a quick recoil. He worked early and late to unravel whatever was complicated or difficult in the records of the transactions of the House; was always in attendance to explain whatever required explanation; sat in his old room sometimes very late at night, studying points by his mastery of which he could spare Mr. Dombey the pain of being personally referred to; and then would go home to Islington, and calm his mind by producing the most dismal and forlorn sounds out of his violoncello before going to bed.

He was solacing himself with this melodious grumbler one evening, and, having been much dispirited by the proceedings of the day, was scraping consolation out of its deepest notes, when his landlady (who was fortunately deaf, and had no other consciousness of these performances than a sensation of something rumbling in her bones) announced a lady.

"In mourning," she said.

The violoncello stopped immediately; and the performer, laying it on a sofa with great tenderness and care, made a sign that the lady was to come in. He followed directly, and met Harriet Carker on the stair.

"Alone!" he said, "and John here this morning! Is there anything the matter, my dear? But no," he added, "your face tells quite another story."

"I am afraid it is a selfish revelation that you see there, then," she answered.

"It is a very pleasant one," said he; "and, if selfish, a novelty too, worth seeing in you. But I don't believe that."

He had placed a chair for her by this time,

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and sat down opposite; the violoncello lying snugly on the sofa between them.

"You will not be surprised at my coming alone, or at John's not having told you I was coming," said Harriet: "and you *will* believe that, when I tell you why I have come. May I do so now?"

"You can do nothing better."

"You were not busy?"

He pointed to the violoncello lying on the sofa, and said, "I have been all day. Here's my witness. I have been confiding all my cares to it. I wish I had none but my own to tell."

"Is the House at an end?" said Harriet earnestly.

"Completely at an end."

"Will it never be resumed?"

"Never."

The bright expression of her face was not overshadowed as her lips silently repeated the word. He seemed to observe this with some little involuntary surprise; and said again:

"Never. You remember what I told you. It has been, all along, impossible to convince him; impossible to reason with him; sometimes impossible even to approach him. The worst has happened; and the House has fallen, never to be built up any more."

"And Mr. Dombey, is he personally ruined?"

"Ruined."

"Will he have no private fortune left? Nothing?"

A certain eagerness in her voice, and something that was almost joyful in her look, seemed to surprise him more and more; to disappoint him too, and jar discordantly against his own emotions. He drummed with the fingers of one hand on the table, looking wistfully at her, and shaking his head, said, after a pause:

"The extent of Mr. Dombey's resources is not accurately within my knowledge; but though they are doubtless very large, his obligations are enormous. He is a gentleman of high honour and integrity. Any man in his position could, and many a man in his position would, have saved himself, by making terms which would have very slightly, almost insensibly, increased the losses of those who had had dealings with him, and left him a remnant to live upon. But he is resolved on payment to the last farthing of his means. His own words are, that they will clear, or nearly clear, the House, and that no one can lose much. Ah, Miss Harriet, it would do us no harm to remember oftener than we do that vices are sometimes only virtues carried to excess! His pride shows well in this."

She heard him with little or no change in her

expression, and with a divided attention that showed her to be busy with something in her own mind. When he was silent, she asked him hurriedly :

"Have you seen him lately?"

"No one sees him. When this crisis of his affairs renders it necessary for him to come out of his house, he comes out for the occasion, and again goes home, and shuts himself up, and will see no one. He has written me a letter, acknowledging our past connection in higher terms than it deserved, and parting from me. I am delicate of obtruding myself upon him now, never having had much intercourse with him in better times; but I have tried to do so. I have written, gone there, entreated. Quite in vain."

He watched her, as in the hope that she would testify some greater concern than she had yet shown; and spoke gravely and feelingly, as if to impress her the more; but there was no change in her.

"Well, well, Miss Harriet," he said with a disappointed air, "this is not to the purpose. You have not come here to hear this. Some other and pleasanter theme is in your mind. Let it be in mine too; and we shall talk upon more equal terms. Come!"

"No, it is the same theme," returned Harriet, with frank and quick surprise. "Is it not likely that it should be? Is it not natural that John and I should have been thinking and speaking very much of late of these great changes? Mr. Dombey, whom he served so many years—you know upon what terms—reduced, as you describe; and we quite rich!"

Good, true face as that face of hers was, and pleasant as it had been to him, Mr. Morfin, the hazel-eyed bachelor, since the first time he had ever looked upon it, it pleased him less at that moment, lighted with a ray of exultation, than it had ever pleased him before.

"I need not remind you," said Harriet, casting down her eyes upon her black dress, "through what means our circumstances changed. You have not forgotten that our brother James, upon that dreadful day, left no will, no relations but ourselves."

The face was pleasanter to him now, though it was pale and melancholy, than it had been a moment since. He seemed to breathe more cheerily.

"You know," she said, "our history, the history of both my brothers, in connection with the unfortunate, unhappy gentleman of whom you have spoken so truly. You know how few our wants are—John's and mine—and what little use we have for money, after the life we have

led together for so many years; and now that he is earning an income that is ample for us, through your kindness. You are not unprepared to hear what favour I have come to ask of you?"

"I hardly know. I was a minute ago. Now I think I am not."

"Of my dead brother I say nothing. If the dead know what we do—— But you understand me. Of my living brother I could say much: but what need I say more than that this act of duty, in which I have come to ask your indispensable assistance, is his own, and that he cannot rest until it is performed?"

She raised her eyes again; and the light of exultation in her face began to appear beautiful in the observant eyes that watched her.

"Dear sir," she went on to say, "it must be done very quietly and secretly. Your experience and knowledge will point out a way of doing it. Mr. Dombey may, perhaps, be led to believe that it is something saved, unexpectedly, from the wreck of his fortunes; or that it is a voluntary tribute to his honourable and upright character, from some of those with whom he has had great dealings; or that it is some old lost debt repaid. There must be many ways of doing it. I know you will choose the best. The favour I have come to ask is, that you will do it for us in your own kind, generous, considerate manner. That you will never speak of it to John, whose chief happiness in this act of restitution is to do it secretly, unknown, and unapproved of; that only a very small part of the inheritance may be reserved to us, until Mr. Dombey shall have possessed the interest of the rest for the remainder of his life; that you will keep our secret faithfully—but that I am sure you will; and that, from this time, it may seldom be whispered, even between you and me, but may live in my thoughts only as a new reason for thankfulness to Heaven, and joy and pride in my brother."

Such a look of exultation there may be on Angels' faces, when the one repentant sinner enters Heaven, among ninety-nine just men. It was not dimmed or tarnished by the joyful tears that filled her eyes, but was the brighter for them.

"My dear Harriet," said Mr. Morfin after a silence, "I was not prepared for this. Do I understand you that you wish to make your own part in the inheritance available for your good purpose, as well as John's?"

"Oh yes!" she returned. "When we have shared everything together for so long a time, and have had no care, hope, or purpose apart,

could I bear to be excluded from my share in this? May I not urge a claim to be my brother's partner and companion to the last?"

"Heaven forbid that I should dispute it!" he replied.

"We may rely on your friendly help?" she said. "I knew we might!"

"I should be a worse man than—than I hope I am, or would willingly believe myself, if I could not give you that assurance from my heart and soul. You may, implicitly. Upon my honour, I will keep your secret. And if it should be found that Mr. Dombey is so reduced as I fear he will be, acting on a determination that there seem to be no means of influencing, I will assist you to accomplish the design, on which you and John are jointly resolved."

She gave him her hand, and thanked him with a cordial, happy face.

"Harriet," he said, detaining it in his, "to speak to you of the worth of any sacrifice that you can make now—above all, of any sacrifice of mere money—would be idle and presumptuous. To put before you any appeal to reconsider your purpose, or to set narrow limits to it, would be, I feel, not less so. I have no right to mar the great end of a great history by any obtrusion of my own weak self. I have every right to bend my head before what you confide to me, satisfied that it comes from a higher and better source of inspiration than my poor worldly knowledge. I will say only this,—I am your faithful steward; and I would rather be so, and your chosen friend, than I would be anybody in the world, except yourself."

She thanked him again cordially, and wished him good night.

"Are you going home?" he said. "Let me go with you."

"Not to-night. I am not going home now; I have a visit to make alone. Will you come to-morrow?"

"Well, well," said he, "I'll come to-morrow. In the meantime, I'll think of this, and how we can best proceed. And perhaps *you* will think of it, dear Harriet, and—and—think of me a little in connection with it."

He handed her down to a coach she had in waiting at the door; and if his landlady had not been deaf, she would have heard him muttering as he went back up-stairs, when the coach had driven off, that we were creatures of habit, and it was a sorrowful habit to be an old bachelor.

The violoncello lying on the sofa between the two chairs, he took it up, without putting away the vacant chair, and sat droning on it, and

slowly shaking his head at the vacant chair, for a long, long time. The expression he communicated to the instrument at first, though monotonously pathetic and bland, was nothing to the expression he communicated to his own face, and bestowed upon the empty chair: which was so sincere, that he was obliged to have recourse to Captain Cuttle's remedy more than once, and to rub his face with his sleeve. By degrees, however, the violoncello, in unison with his own frame of mind, glided melodiously into the Harmonious Blacksmith, which he played over and over again, until his ruddy and serene face gleamed like true metal on the anvil of a veritable blacksmith. In fine, the violoncello and the empty chair were the companions of his bachelorhood until nearly midnight; and when he took his supper, the violoncello set up on end in the sofa corner, big with the latent harmony of a whole foundry full of harmonious blacksmiths, seemed to ogle the empty chair out of its crooked eyes with unutterable intelligence.

When Harriet left the house, the driver of her hired coach, taking a course that was evidently no new one to him, went in and out by by-ways, through that part of the suburbs, until he arrived at some open ground, where there were a few quiet little old houses standing among gardens. At the garden-gate of one of these he stopped, and Harriet alighted.

Her gentle ringing at the bell was responded to by a dolorous-looking woman, of light complexion, with raised eyebrows, and head drooping on one side, who curtsied at sight of her, and conducted her across the garden to the house.

"How is your patient, nurse, to-night?" said Harriet.

"In a poor way, miss, I am afraid. Oh, how she do remind me, sometimes, of my uncle's Betsey Jane!" returned the woman of the light complexion, in a sort of doleful rapture.

"In what respect?" asked Harriet.

"Miss, in all respects," replied the other, "except that she's grown up, and Betsey Jane, when at death's door, was but a child."

"But you have told me she recovered," observed Harriet mildly; "so there is the more reason for hope, Mrs. Wickam."

"Ah, miss, hope is an excellent thing for such as has the spirits to bear it!" said Mrs. Wickam, shaking her head. "My own spirits is not equal to it, but I don't owe it any grudge. I envies them that is so blessed!"

"You should try to be more cheerful," remarked Harriet.

"Thank you, miss, I'm sure," said Mrs.

Wickam grimly. "If I was so inclined, the loneliness of this situation—you'll excuse my speaking so free—would put it out of my power in four-and-twenty hours; but I an't at all. I'd rather not. The little spirits that I ever had, I was bereaved of at Brighton some few years ago; and I think I feel myself the better for it."

In truth, this was the very Mrs. Wickam who had superseded Mrs. Richards, as the nurse of little Paul, and who considered herself to have gained the loss in question under the roof of the amiable Pipchin. The excellent and thoughtful old system, hallowed by long prescription, which has usually picked out from the rest of mankind the most dreary and uncomfortable people that could possibly be laid hold of, to act as instructors of youth, finger-posts to the virtues, matrons, monitors, attendants on sick beds, and the like, had established Mrs. Wickam in very good business as a nurse, and had led to her serious qualities being particularly commended by an admiring and numerous connection.

Mrs. Wickam, with her eyebrows elevated, and her head on one side, lighted the way upstairs to a clean, neat chamber, opening on another chamber dimly lighted, where there was a bed. In the first room an old woman sat mechanically staring out at the open window on the darkness. In the second, stretched upon the bed, lay the shadow of a figure that had spurned the wind and rain one wintry night; hardly to be recognised now, but by the long black hair that showed so very black against the colourless face, and all the white things about it.

Oh, the strong eyes, and the weak frame! The eyes that turned so eagerly and brightly to the door when Harriet came in; the feeble head that could not raise itself, and moved so slowly round upon its pillow!

"Alice!" said the visitor's mild voice, "am I late to-night?"

"You always seem late, but are always early."

Harriet had sat down by the bedside now, and put her hand upon the thin hand lying there.

"You are better?"

Mrs. Wickam, standing at the foot of the bed, like a disconsolate spectre, most decidedly and forcibly shook her head to negative this position.

"It matters very little!" said Alice with a faint smile. "Better or worse to-day is but a day's difference—perhaps not so much."

Mrs. Wickam, as a serious character, expressed her approval with a groan; and having made some cold dabs at the bottom of the bedclothes, as feeling for the patient's feet, and expecting to find them stony, went clinking

among the medicine bottles on the table, as who should say, "While we *are* here, let us repeat the mixture as before."

"No," said Alice, whispering to her visitor, "evil courses and remorse, travel, want, and weather, storm within and storm without, have worn my life away. It will not last much longer."

She drew the hand up as she spoke, and laid her face against it.

"I lie here, sometimes, thinking I should like to live until I had had a little time to show you how grateful I could be! It is a weakness, and soon passes. Better for you as it is. Better for me!"

How different her hold upon the hand to what it had been when she took it by the fireside on the bleak winter evening! Scorn, rage, defiance, recklessness, look here! This is the end.

Mrs. Wickam, having clinked sufficiently among the bottles, now produced the mixture. Mrs. Wickam looked hard at her patient in the act of drinking, screwed her mouth up tight, her eyebrows also, and shook her head, expressing that tortures shouldn't make her say it was a hopeless case. Mrs. Wickam then sprinkled a little cooling stuff about the room, with the air of a female grave-digger, who was strewing ashes on ashes, dust on dust—for she was a serious character—and withdrew to partake of certain funeral baked meats down-stairs.

"How long is it," asked Alice, "since I went to you and told you what I had done, and when you were advised it was too late for any one to follow?"

"It is a year and more," said Harriet.

"A year and more," said Alice, thoughtfully intent upon her face. "Months upon months since you brought me here!"

Harriet answered "Yes."

"Brought me here by force of gentleness and kindness. Me!" said Alice, shrinking with her face behind the hand, "and made me human by woman's looks and words, and angel's deeds!"

Harriet, bending over her, composed and soothed her. By-and-by Alice, lying as before, with the hand against her face, asked to have her mother called.

Harriet called to her more than once; but the old woman was so absorbed, looking out at the open window on the darkness, that she did not hear. It was not until Harriet went to her and touched her that she rose up, and came.

"Mother," said Alice, taking the hand again, and fixing her lustrous eyes lovingly upon her visitor, while she merely addressed a motion of her finger to the old woman, "tell her what you know."

"To-night, my deary?"

"Ay, mother," answered Alice faintly and solemnly, "to-night!"

The old woman, whose wits appeared disordered by alarm, remorse, or grief, came creeping along the side of the bed, opposite to that on which Harriet sat; and kneeling down, so as to bring her withered face on a level with the coverlet, and stretching out her hand, so as to touch her daughter's arm, began:

"My handsome gal——"

Heaven, what a cry was that with which she stopped there, gazing at the poor form lying on the bed!

"Changed long ago, mother! Withered long ago," said Alice, without looking at her. "Don't grieve for that now."

"—My daughter," faltered the old woman, "my gal who'll soon get better, and shame 'em all with her good looks."

Alice smiled mournfully at Harriet, and fondled her hand a little closer, but said nothing.

"Who'll soon get better, I say," repeated the old woman, menacing the vacant air with her shrivelled fist, "and who'll shame 'em all with her good looks—she will. I say she will! she shall!"—as if she were in passionate contention with some unseen opponent at the bedside, who contradicted her—"my daughter has been turned away from, and cast out; but she could boast relationship to proud folks too, if she chose. Ah! To proud folks! There's relationship without your clergy and your wedding-rings—they may make it, but they can't break it—and my daughter's well related. Show me Mrs. Dombey, and I'll show you my Alice's first cousin."

Harriet glanced from the old woman to the lustrous eyes intent upon her face, and derived corroboration from them.

"What!" cried the old woman, her nodding head bridling with a ghastly vanity. "Though I am old and ugly now,—much older by life and habit than years, though, I was once as young as any. Ah! as pretty, too, as many! I was a fresh country wench in my time, darling," stretching out her arm to Harriet across the bed, "and looked it, too. Down in my country, Mrs. Dombey's father and his brother were the gayest gentlemen and the best liked that come a visiting from London—they have long been dead, though! Lord, Lord, this long while! The brother, who was my Ally's father, longest of the two."

She raised her head a little, and peered at her daughter's face; as if, from the remembrance of

her own youth, she had flown to the remembrance of her child's. Then suddenly she laid her face down on the bed, and shut her head up in her hands and arms.

"They were as like," said the old woman, without looking up, "as you could see two brothers, so near an age—there wasn't much more than a year between them, as I recollect—and if you could have seen my gal, as I have seen her once, side by side with the other's daughter, you'd have seen, for all the difference of dress and life, that they were like each other. Oh! is the likeness gone, and is it my gal—only my gal—that's to change so?"

"We shall all change, mother, in our turn," said Alice.

"Turn!" cried the old woman, "but why not hers as soon as my gal's? The mother must have changed—she looked as old as me, and full as wrinkled through her paint—but *she* was handsome. What have I done, I, what have I done worse than her, that only my gal is to lie there fading?"

With another of those wild cries, she went running out into the room from which she had come; but immediately, in her uncertain mood, returned, and, creeping up to Harriet, said:

"That's what Alice bade me tell you, deary. That's all. I found it out when I began to ask who she was, and all about her, away in Warwickshire there, one summer-time. Such relations was no good to me then. They wouldn't have owned me, and had nothing to give me. I should have asked 'em, maybe, for a little money afterwards, if it hadn't been for my Alice; she'd a'most have killed me if I had, I think. She was as proud as t'other in her way," said the old woman, touching the face of her daughter fearfully, and withdrawing her hand, "for all she's so quiet now; but she'll shame 'em with her good looks yet. Ha, ha! *She'll* shame 'em, will my handsome daughter!"

Her laugh, as she retreated, was worse than her cry; worse than the burst of imbecile lamentation in which it ended; worse than the dotting air with which she sat down in her old seat, and stared out at the darkness.

The eyes of Alice had all this time been fixed on Harriet, whose hand she had never released. She said now:

"I have felt, lying here, that I should like you to know this. It might explain, I have thought, something that used to help to harden me. I had heard so much, in my wrong-doing, of my neglected duty, that I took up with the belief that duty had not been done to me, and that, as the seed was sown, the harvest grew. I

somehow made it out that, when ladies had bad homes and mothers, they went wrong in their way too; but that their way was not so foul a one as mine, and they had need to bless God for it. That is all past. It is like a dream now, which I cannot quite remember or understand. It has been more and more like a dream, every day, since you began to sit here, and read to me. I only tell it you as I can recollect it. Will you read to me a little more?"

Harriet was withdrawing her hand to open the book, when Alice detained it for a moment.

"You will not forget my mother? I forgive her, if I have any cause. I know that she forgives me, and is sorry in her heart. You will not forget her?"

"Never, Alice!"

"A moment yet. Lay my head so, dear, that as you read, I may see the words in your kind face."

Harriet complied and read—read the eternal book for all the weary and the heavy-laden; for all the wretched, fallen, and neglected of this earth—read the blessed history, in which the blind, lame, palsied beggar, the criminal, the woman stained with shame, the shunned of all our dainty clay, has each a portion that no human pride, indifference, or sophistry through all the ages that this world shall last, can take away, or by the thousandth atom of a grain reduce—read the ministry of Him who, through the round of human life, and all its hopes and griefs, from birth to death, from infancy to age, had sweet compassion for, and interest in, its every scene and stage, its every suffering and sorrow.

"I shall come," said Harriet when she shut the book, "very early in the morning."

The lustrous eyes, yet fixed upon her face, closed for a moment, then opened; and Alice kissed and blessed her.

The same eyes followed her to the door; and in their light, and on the tranquil face, there was a smile when it was closed.

They never turned away. She laid her hand upon her breast, murmuring the sacred name that had been read to her; and life passed from her face, like light removed.

Nothing lay there, any longer, but the ruin of the mortal house on which the rain had beaten, and the black hair that had fluttered in the wintry wind.

CHAPTER LIX.

RETRIBUTION.



CHANGES have come again upon the great house in the long dull street, once the scene of Florence's childhood and loneliness. It is a great house still, proof against wind and weather, without breaches in the roof, or shattered windows, or dilapidated walls; but it is a ruin none the less, and the rats fly from it.

Mr. Towlinson and company are, at first, incredulous in respect of the shapeless rumours that they hear. Cook says our people's credit ain't so easy shook as that comes to, thank God; and Mr. Towlinson expects to hear it reported, next, that the Bank of England's a-going to break, or the jewels in the Tower to be sold up. But, next come the Gazette and Mr. Perch: and Mr. Perch brings Mrs. Perch to talk it over in the kitchen, and to spend a pleasant evening.

As soon as there is no doubt about it, Mr. Towlinson's main anxiety is that the failure should be a good round one—not less than a hundred thousand pound. Mr. Perch don't think himself that a hundred thousand pound will nearly cover it. 'The women, led by Mrs. Perch and cook, often repeat "a hundred thousand pound!" with awful satisfaction—as if handling the words were like handling the money; and the housemaid, who has her eye on Mr. Towlinson, wishes she had only a hundredth part of the sum to bestow on the man of her choice. Mr. Towlinson, still mindful of his old wrong, opines that a foreigner would hardly know what to do with so much money, unless he spent it on his whiskers; which bitter sarcasm causes the housemaid to withdraw in tears.

But not to remain long absent; for cook, who has the reputation of being extremely good-hearted, says, whatever they do, let 'em stand by one another now; Towlinson, for there's no telling how soon they may be divided. They have been in that house (says cook) through a funeral, a wedding, and a running away; and let it not be said that they couldn't agree among themselves at such a time as the present. Mrs. Perch is immensely affected by this moving address, and openly remarks that cook is an angel. Mr. Towlinson replies to cook, Far be it from him to stand in the way of that good feeling which he could wish to see; and ad-journing in quest of the housemaid, and presently returning with that young lady on his arm, informs the kitchen that foreigners is only his

fun, and that him and Anne have now resolved to take one another for better for worse, and to settle in Oxford Market in the general green-grocery and herb and leech line, where your kind favours is particular requested. This announcement is received with acclamation; and Mrs. Perch, projecting her soul into futurity, says "Girls" in cook's ear, in a solemn whisper.

Misfortune in the family without feasting, in these lower regions, couldn't be. Therefore cook tosses up a hot dish or two for supper, and Mr. Towlinson compounds a lobster salad, to be devoted to the same hospitable purpose. Even Mrs. Pipchin, agitated by the occasion, rings her bell, and sends down word that she requests to have that little bit of sweetbread that was left, warmed up for her supper, and sent to her on a tray with about a quarter of a tumblerful of mulled sherry; for she feels poorly.

There is a little talk about Mr. Dombey, but very little. It is chiefly speculation as to how long he has known that this was going to happen. Cook says shrewdly, "Oh, a long time, bless you! Take your oath of that." And reference being made to Mr. Perch, he confirms her view of the case. Somebody wonders what he'll do, and whether he'll go out in any situation: Mr. Towlinson thinks not, and hints at a refuge in one of them genteel almshouses of the better kind. "Ah! where he'll have his little garden, you know," says cook plaintively, "and bring up sweet-peas in the spring." "Exactly so," says Mrs. Towlinson, "and be one of the Brethren of something or another." "We are all brethren," says Mrs. Perch in a pause of her drink. "Except the sisters," says Mr. Perch. "How are the mighty fallen!" remarks cook. "Pride shall have a fall, and it always was and will be so!" observes the housemaid.

It is wonderful how good they feel in making these reflections; and what a Christian unanimity they are sensible of, in bearing the common shock with resignation. There is only one interruption to this excellent state of mind, which is occasioned by a young kitchen-maid of inferior rank—in black stockings—who, having sat with her mouth open for a long time, unexpectedly discharges from it words to this effect, "Suppose the wages shouldn't be paid!" The company sit for a moment speechless; but cook, recovering first, turns upon the young woman, and requests to know how she dares insult the family, whose bread she eats, by such a dishonest supposition, and whether she thinks that anybody, with a scrap of honour left, could deprive poor servants of their pittance? "Because, if *that* is your religious feelings, Mary Daws,"

says cook warmly, "I don't know where you mean to go to."

Mr. Towlinson don't know either; nor anybody; and the young kitchen-maid, appearing not to know exactly herself, and scouted by the general voice, is covered with confusion, as with a garment.

After a few days, strange people begin to call at the house and to make appointments with one another in the dining-room, as if they lived there. Especially, there is a gentleman of a Mosaic-Arabian cast of countenance, with a very massive watch-guard, who whistles in the drawing-room, and, while he is waiting for the other gentleman, who always has pen and ink in his pocket, asks Mr. Towlinson (by the easy name of "Old Cock") if he happens to know what the figure of them crimson and gold hangings might have been when new bought. The callers and appointments in the dining-room become more numerous every day, and every gentleman seems to have pen and ink in his pocket, and to have some occasion to use it. At last it is said that there is going to be a Sale; and then more people arrive, with pen and ink in their pockets, commanding a detachment of men with carpet caps, who immediately begin to pull up the carpets, and knock the furniture about, and to print off thousands of impressions of their shoes upon the hall and staircase.

The council down-stairs are in full concave all this time, and, having nothing to do, perform perfect feats of eating. At length they are one day summoned in a body to Mrs. Pipchin's room, and thus addressed by the fair Peruvian:

"Your master's in difficulties," says Mrs. Pipchin tartly. "You know that, I suppose?"

Mr. Towlinson, as spokesman, admits a general knowledge of the fact.

"And you're all on the look-out for yourselves, I warrant you," says Mrs. Pipchin, shaking her head at them.

A shrill voice from the rear exclaims, "No more than yourself!"

"That's your opinion, Mrs. Impudence, is it?" says the ireful Pipchin, looking with a fiery eye over the intermediate heads.

"Yes, Mrs. Pipchin, it is," replies cook, advancing. "And what then, pray?"

"Why, then you may go as soon as you like," says Mrs. Pipchin. "The sooner the better, and I hope I shall never see your face again."

With this the doughty Pipchin produces a canvas bag; and tells her wages out to that day, and a month beyond it; and clutches the money tight until a receipt for the same is duly signed, to the last up-stroke; when she grudgingly lets

it go. This form of proceeding Mrs. Pipchin repeats with every member of the household, until all are paid.

"Now, those that choose can go about their business," says Mrs. Pipchin, "and those that choose can stay here on board wages for a week or so, and make themselves useful. Except," says the inflammable Pipchin, "that slut of a cook, who'll go immediately."

"That," says cook, "she certainly will! I

wish you good day, Mrs. Pipchin, and sincerely wish I could compliment you on the sweetness of your appearance!"

"Get along with you!" says Mrs. Pipchin, stamping her foot.

Cook sails off with an air of beneficent dignity, highly exasperating to Mrs. Pipchin, and is shortly joined below-stairs by the rest of the confederation.

Mr. Towlinson then says 'that, in the first



"YES, MRS. PIPCHIN, IT IS," REPLIES COOK, ADVANCING. "AND WHAT THEN, PRAY?"

place, he would beg to propose a little snack of something to eat; and over that snack would desire to offer a suggestion which he thinks will meet the position in which they find themselves. The refreshment being produced, and very heartily partaken of, Mr. Towlinson's suggestion is, in effect, that cook is going, and that if we are not true to ourselves, nobody will be true to us. That they have lived in that house a long time, and exerted themselves very much to be sociable together. (At this, cook says,

with emotion, "Hear, hear!" and Mrs. Perch, who is there again, and full to the throat, sheds tears.) And that he thinks, at the present time, the feeling ought to be, "Go one, go all!" The housemaid is much affected by this generous sentiment, and warmly seconds it. Cook says she feels it's right, and only hopes it's not done as a compliment to her, but from a sense of duty. Mr. Towlinson replies, from a sense of duty: and that now he is driven to express his opinions, he will openly say, that he does not

think it over-respectable to remain in a house where Sales and such-like are carrying forwards. The housemaid is sure of it; and relates, in confirmation, that a strange man, in a carpet cap, offered, this very morning, to kiss her on the stairs. Hereupon Mr. Towlinson is starting from his chair, to seek and "smash" the offender; when he is laid hold on by the ladies, who beseech him to calm himself, and to reflect that it is easier and wiser to leave the scene of such indecencies at once. Mrs. Perch, presenting the case in a new light, even shows that delicacy towards Mr. Dombey, shut up in his own rooms, imperatively demands precipitate retreat. "For what," says the good woman, "must his feelings be, if he was to come upon any of the poor servants that he once deceived into thinking him immensely rich!" Cook is so struck by this moral consideration, that Mrs. Perch improves it with several pious axioms, original and selected. It becomes a clear case that they must all go. Boxes are packed, cabs fetched, and at dusk that evening there is not one member of the party left.

The house stands, large and weather-proof, in the long dull street; but it is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.

The men in the carpet caps go on tumbling the furniture about; and the gentlemen with the pens and ink make out inventories of it, and sit upon pieces of furniture never made to be sat upon, and eat bread and cheese from the public-house on other pieces of furniture never made to be eaten on, and seem to have a delight in appropriating precious articles to strange uses. Chaotic combinations of furniture also take place. Mattresses and bedding appear in the dining-room; the glass and china get into the conservatory; the great dinner service is set out in heaps on the long divan in the large drawing-room; and the stair-wires, made into fasces, decorate the marble chimney-pieces. Finally, a rug, with a printed bill upon it, is hung out from the balcony; and a similar appendage graces either side of the hall-door.

Then, all day long, there is a retinue of mouldy gigs and chaise-carts in the street; and herds of shabby vampires, Jew and Christian, overrun the house, sounding the plate-glass mirrors with their knuckles, striking discordant octaves on the grand piano, drawing wet forefingers over the pictures, breathing on the blades of the best dinner knives, punching the squabs of chairs and sofas with their dirty fists, tousling the feather beds, opening and shutting all the drawers, balancing the silver spoons and forks, looking into the very threads of the drapery

and linen, and disparaging everything. There is not a secret place in the whole house. Fluffy and snuffy strangers stare into the kitchen range, as curiously as into the attic clothes-press. Stout men, with napless hats on, look out of the bedroom windows, and cut jokes with friends in the street. Quiet, calculating spirits withdraw into the dressing-rooms with catalogues, and make marginal notes thereon with stumps of pencils. Two brokers invade the very fire-escape, and take a panoramic survey of the neighbourhood from the top of the house. The swarm and buzz, and going up and down, endure for days. The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on view.

Then there is a palisade of tables made in the best drawing-room; and on the capital, French-polished, extending, telescopic range of Spanish mahogany dining-tables, with turned legs, the pulpit of the Auctioneer is erected; and the herds of shabby vampires, Jew and Christian, the strangers fluffy and snuffy, and the stout men with the napless hats, congregate, about it, and sit upon everything within reach, mantel-pieces included, and begin to bid. Hot, humming, and dusty are the rooms all day; and—high above the heat, hum, and dust—the head and shoulders, voice and hammer, of the Auctioneer are ever at work. The men in the carpet caps get flustered and vicious with tumbling the Lots about, and still the Lots are going, going, gone; still coming on. Sometimes there is joking and a general roar. This lasts all day, and three days following. The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on sale.

Then the mouldy gigs and chaise-carts reappear; and with them come spring vans and waggons, and an army of porters with knots. All day long, the men with carpet caps are screwing at screw-drivers and bed-winchies, or staggering by the dozen together on the staircase under heavy burdens, or upheaving perfect rocks of Spanish mahogany, best rosewood, or plate glass, into the gigs and chaise-carts, vans and waggons. All sorts of vehicles of burden are in attendance, from a tilted waggon to a wheelbarrow. Poor Paul's little bedstead is carried off in a donkey-tandem. For nearly a whole week the Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is in course of removal.

At last it is all gone. Nothing is left about the house but scattered leaves of catalogues, littered scraps of straw and hay, and a battery of pewter pots behind the hall-door. The men with the carpet caps gather up their screw-drivers and bed-winchies into bags, shoulder

them, and walk off. One of the pen-and-ink gentlemen goes over the house as a last attention; sticking up bills in the windows respecting the lease of this desirable family mansion, and shutting the shutters. At length he follows the men with the carpet caps. None of the invaders remain. The house is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.

Mrs. Pipchin's apartments, together with those locked rooms on the ground-floor where the window blinds are drawn down close, have been spared the general devastation. Mrs. Pipchin has remained austere and stony during the proceedings, in her own room; or has occasionally looked in at the sale to see what the goods are fetching, and to bid for one particular easy-chair. Mrs. Pipchin has been the highest bidder for the easy-chair, and sits upon her property when Mrs. Chick comes to see her.

"How is my brother, Mrs. Pipchin?" says Mrs. Chick.

"I don't know any more than the deuce," says Mrs. Pipchin. "He never does me the honour to speak to me. He has his meat and drink put in the next room to his own; and what he takes, he comes out and takes when there's nobody there. It's no use asking me. I know no more about him than the man in the south who burnt his mouth by eating cold plum porridge."

This the acrimonious Pipchin says with a founce.

"But good gracious me!" cries Mrs. Chick blandly, "how long is this to last? If my brother will not make an effort, Mrs. Pipchin, what is to become of him? I am sure I should have thought he had seen enough of the consequences of *not* making an effort, by this time, to be warned against that fatal error."

"Hoity-toity!" says Mrs. Pipchin, rubbing her nose. "There's a great fuss, I think, about it. It ain't so wonderful a case. People have had misfortunes before now, and been obliged to part with their furniture. I'm sure *I* have!"

"My brother," pursues Mrs. Chick profoundly, "is so peculiar—so strange a man. He is the most peculiar man *I* ever saw. Would any one believe that when he received news of the marriage and emigration of that unnatural child—it's a comfort to me, now, to remember that I always said there was something extraordinary about that child: but nobody minds me—would anybody believe, I say, that he should then turn round upon me, and say he had supposed, from my manner, that she had come to my house? Why, my gracious! And would anybody believe that when I merely say

to him, 'Paul, I may be very foolish, and I have no doubt I am, but I cannot understand how your affairs can have got into this state,' he should actually fly at me, and request that I will come to see him no more until he asks me? Why, my goodness!"

"Ah!" says Mrs. Pipchin. "It's a pity he hadn't a little more to do with mines. They'd have tried his temper for him."

"And what," resumes Mrs. Chick, quite regardless of Mrs. Pipchin's observations, "is it to end in? That's what I want to know. What does my brother mean to do? He must do something. It's of no use remaining shut up in his own rooms. Business won't come to him. No. He must go to it. Then why don't he go? He knows where to go, I suppose, having been a man of business all his life. Very good. Then why not go there?"

Mrs. Chick, after forging this powerful chain of reasoning, remains silent for a minute to admire it.

"Besides," says the discreet lady, with an argumentative air, "who ever heard of such obstinacy as his staying shut up here through all these dreadful disagreeables? It's not as if there was no place for him to go to. Of course he could have come to our house. He knows he is at home there, I suppose? Mr. Chick has perfectly bored about it, and I said with my own lips, 'Why, surely, Paul, you don't imagine that because your affairs have got into this state, you are the less at home to such near relatives as ourselves? You don't imagine that we are like the rest of the world?' But no; here he stays all through, and here he is. Why, good gracious me, suppose the house was to be let! what would he do then? He couldn't remain here then. If he attempted to do so, there would be an ejection, and action for Doe, and all sorts of things; and then he *must* go. Then why not go at first instead of at last? And that brings me back to what I said just now, and I naturally ask what is to be the end of it?"

"I know what's to be the end of it, as far as *I* am concerned," replies Mrs. Pipchin, "and that's enough for me. I'm going to take *myself* off in a jiffy."

"In a which, Mrs. Pipchin?" says Mrs. Chick.

"In a jiffy," retorts Mrs. Pipchin sharply.

"Ah, well! really, I can't blame you, Mrs. Pipchin," says Mrs. Chick with frankness.

"It would be pretty much the same to me if you could," replies the sardonic Pipchin. "At any rate, I'm going. I can't stop here. I should be dead in a week. I

had to cook my own pork chop yesterday, and I'm not used to it. My constitution will be giving way next. Besides, I had a very fair connection at Brighton when I came here—little Pankey's folks alone were worth a good eighty pounds a year to me—and I can't afford to throw it away. I've written to my niece, and she expects me by this time."

"Have you spoken to my brother?" inquires Mrs. Chick.

"Oh yes, it's very easy to say speak to him," retorts Mrs. Pipchin. "How is it done? I called out to him yesterday that I was no use here, and that he had better let me send for Mrs. Richards. He grunted something or other that meant yes, and I sent. Grunt, indeed! If he had been Mr. Pipchin, he'd have had some reason to grunt. Yah! I've no patience with it!"

Here this exemplary female, who has pumped up so much fortitude and virtue from the depths of the Peruvian mines, rises from her cushioned property to see Mrs. Chick to the door. Mrs. Chick, deploring to the last the peculiar character of her brother, noiselessly retires, much occupied with her own sagacity and clearness, of head.

In the dusk of the evening, Mr. Toodle, being off duty, arrives with Polly and a box, and leaves them, with a sounding kiss, in the hall of the empty house, the retired character of which affects Mr. Toodle's spirits strongly.

"I tell you what, Polly my dear," says Mr. Toodle. "Being now an ingen-driver, and well to do in the world, I shouldn't allow of your coming here to be made dull-like, if it warn't for favours past. But favours past, Polly, is never to be forgot. To them which is in adversity, besides, your face is a cord'l. So let's have another kiss on it, my dear. You wish no better than to do a right act, I know; and my views is, that it's right and dutiful to do this. Good night, Polly!"

Mrs. Pipchin by this time looms dark in her black bombazine skirts, black bonnet, and shawl; and has her personal property packed up; and has her chair (late a favourite chair of Mr. Dombey's, and the dead bargain of the sale) ready near the street-door; and is only waiting for a fly van, going to-night to Brighton on private service, which is to call for her by private contract, and convey her home.

Presently it comes. Mrs. Pipchin's wardrobe being handed in and stowed away, Mrs. Pipchin's chair is next handed in, and placed in a convenient corner among certain trusses of hay; it being the intention of the amiable

woman to occupy the chair during her journey. Mrs. Pipchin herself is next handed in, and grimly takes her seat. There is a snaky gleam in her hard grey eye, as of anticipated rounds of buttered toast, relays of hot chops, worryings and quellings of young children, sharp snap-pings at poor Berry, and all the other delights of her Ogress's castle. Mrs. Pipchin almost laughs as the fly van drives off, and she composes her black bombazine skirts, and settles herself among the cushions of her easy-chair.

The house is such a ruin that the rats have fled, and there is not one left.

But Polly, though alone in the deserted mansion—for there is no companionship in the shut-up rooms in which its late master hides his head—is not alone long. It is night; and she is sitting at work in the housekeeper's room, trying to forget what a lonely house it is, and what a history belongs to it; when there is a knock at the hall-door, as loud sounding as any knock can be, striking into such an empty place. Opening it, she returns across the echoing hall, accompanied by a female figure in a close black bonnet. It is Miss Tox, and Miss Tox's eyes are red.

"Oh, Polly," says Miss Tox, "when I looked in to have a little lesson with the children just now, I got the message that you left for me; and, as soon as I could recover my spirits at all, I came on after you. Is there no one here but you?"

"Ah! not a soul," says Polly.

"Have you seen him?" whispers Miss Tox.

"Bless you," returns Polly, "no; he has not been seen this many a day. They tell me he never leaves his room."

"Is he said to be ill?" inquires Miss Tox.

"No, ma'am, not that I know of," returns Polly, "except in his mind. He must be very bad there, poor gentleman!"

Miss Tox's sympathy is such that she can scarcely speak. She is no chicken, but she has not grown tough with age and celibacy. Her heart is very tender, her compassion very genuine, her homage very real. Beneath the locket with the fishy eye in it, Miss Tox bears better qualities than many a less whimsical outside; such qualities as will outlive, by many courses of the sun, the best outsides and brightest husks that fall in the harvest of the Great Reaper.

It is long before Miss Tox goes away, and before Polly, with a candle flaring on the blank stairs, looks after her, for company, down the street, and feels unwilling to go back into the dreary house, and jar its emptiness with the

heavy fastenings of the door, and glide away to bed. But all this Polly does; and in the morning sets in one of those darkened rooms such matters as she has been advised to prepare, and then retires, and enters them no more until next morning at the same hour. There are bells there, but they never ring; and though she can sometimes hear a footfall going to and fro, it never comes out.

Miss Tox returns early in the day. It then begins to be Miss Tox's occupation to prepare little dainties—or what are such to her—to be carried into these rooms next morning. She derives so much satisfaction from the pursuit, that she enters on it regularly from that time: and brings daily, in her little basket, various choice condiments selected from the scanty stores of the deceased owner of the powdered head and pigtail. She likewise brings, in sheets of curl-paper, morsels of cold meats, tongues of sheep, halves of fowls, for her own dinner; and sharing these collations with Polly, passes the greater part of her time in the ruined house that the rats have fled from: hiding in a fright at every sound, stealing in and out like a criminal; only desiring to be true to the fallen object of her admiration, unknown to him, unknown to all the world, but one poor simple woman.

The major knows it; but no one is the wiser for that, though the major is much the merrier. The major, in a fit of curiosity, has charged the native to watch the house sometimes, and find out what becomes of Dombey. The native has reported Miss Tox's fidelity, and the major has nearly choked himself dead with laughter. He is permanently bluer from that hour, and constantly wheezes to himself, his lobster eyes starting out of his head, "Damme, sir, the woman's a born idiot!"

And the ruined man. How does he pass the hours alone?

"Let him remember it in that room, years to come!" He did remember it. It was heavy on his mind now; heavier than all the rest.

"Let him remember it in that room, years to come! The rain that falls upon the roof, the wind that mourns outside the door, may have foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!"

He did remember it. In the miserable night he thought of it; in the dreary day, the wretched dawn, the ghostly memory-haunted twilight. He did remember it. In agony, in sorrow, in remorse, in despair! "Papa! papa! Speak to me, dear papa!" He heard the words again, and saw the face. He saw it fall upon the

trembling hands, and heard the one prolonged low cry go upward.

He was fallen, never to be raised up any more. For the night of his worldly ruin there was no to-morrow's sun; for the stain of his domestic shame there was no purification; nothing, thank Heaven, could bring his dead child back to life. But that which he might have made so different in all the past—which might have made the past itself so different, though this he hardly thought of now—that which was his own work, that which he could so easily have wrought into a blessing, and had set himself so steadily for years to form into a curse: that was the sharp grief of his soul.

Oh! He did remember it! The rain that fell upon the roof, the wind that mourned outside the door that night, had had foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. He knew, now, what he had done. He knew, now, that he had called down that upon his head, which bowed it lower than the heaviest stroke of fortune. He knew, now, what it was to be rejected and deserted; now, when every loving blossom he had withered in his innocent daughter's heart was snowing down in ashes on him.

He thought of her as she had been that night when he and his bride came home. He thought of her as she had been in all the home events of the abandoned house. He thought, now, that of all around him, she alone had never changed. His boy had faded into dust, his proud wife had sunk into a polluted creature, his flatterer and friend had been transformed into the worst of villains, his riches had melted away, the very walls that sheltered him looked on him as a stranger; she alone had turned the same mild, gentle look upon him always. Yes, to the latest and the last. She had never changed to him—nor had he ever changed to her—and she was lost.

As, one by one, they fell away before his mind—his baby-hope, his wife, his friend, his fortune—oh, how the mist, through which he had seen her, cleared, and showed him her true self! Oh, how much better than this that he had loved her as he had his boy, and lost her as he had his boy, and laid them in their early grave together!

In his pride—for he was proud yet—he let the world go from him freely. As it fell away, he shook it off. Whether he imagined its face as expressing pity for him, or indifference to him, he shunned it alike. It was in the same degree to be avoided, in either aspect. He had no idea of any one companion in his misery, but the one he had driven away. What he would have said to her, or what consolation submitted to

receive from her, he never pictured to himself. But he always knew she would have been true to him, if he had suffered her. He always knew she would have loved him better now than at any other time: he was as certain that it was in her nature, as he was that there was a sky above him; and he sat thinking so, in his loneliness, from hour to hour. Day after day uttered this speech; night after night showed him this knowledge.

It began, beyond all doubt (however slowly it advanced for some time), in the receipt of her young husband's letter, and the certainty that she was gone. And yet—so proud he was in his ruin, or so reminiscent of her only as something that might have been his, but was lost beyond redemption—that if he could have heard her voice in an adjoining room, he would not have gone to her. If he could have seen her in the street, and she had done no more than look at him as she had been used to look, he would have passed on with his old cold, unforgiving face, and not addressed her, or relaxed it, though his heart should have broken soon afterwards. However turbulent his thoughts, or harsh his anger had been, at first, concerning her marriage, or her husband, that was all past now. He chiefly thought of what might have been, and what was not. What was, was all summed up in this: that she was lost, and he bowed down with sorrow and remorse.

And now he felt that he had had two children born to him in that house, and that between him and the bare, wide, empty walls there was a tie, mournful, but hard to rend asunder, connected with a double childhood, and a double loss. He had thought to leave the house—knowing he must go, not knowing whither—upon the evening of the day on which this feeling first struck root in his breast; but he resolved to stay another night, and in the night to ramble through the rooms once more.

He came out of his solitude when it was the dead of night, and, with a candle in his hand, went softly up the stairs. Of all the footmarks there, making them as common as the common street, there was not one, he thought, but had seemed at the time to set itself upon his brain while he had kept close listening. He looked at their number, and their hurry and contention—foot treading foot out, and upward track and downward jostling one another—and thought, with absolute dread and wonder, how much he must have suffered during that trial, and what a changed man he had cause to be. He thought, besides, oh, was there, somewhere in the world, a light footstep that might have worn out in a

moment half those marks?—and bent his head and wept as he went up.

He almost saw it going on before. He stopped, looking up towards the sky-light; and a figure, childish itself, but carrying a child, and singing as it went, seemed to be there again. Anon, it was the same figure, alone, stopping for an instant, with suspended breath; the bright hair clustering loosely round its tearful face; and looking back at him.

He wandered through the rooms: lately so luxurious; now so bare and dismal, and so changed, apparently, even in their shape and size. The press of footsteps was as thick here; and the same consideration of the suffering he had had perplexed and terrified him. He began to fear that all this intricacy in his brain would drive him mad; and that his thoughts already lost coherence as the footprints did, and were pieced on to one another, with the same trackless, involutions, and varieties of indistinct shapes.

He did not so much as know in which of these rooms she had lived when she was alone. He was glad to leave them, and go wandering higher up. Abundance of associations were here, connected with his false wife, his false friend and servant, his false grounds of pride; but he put them all by now, and only recalled miserably, weakly, fondly, his two children.

Everywhere, the footsteps! They had had no respect for the old room high up, where the little bed had been; he could hardly find a clear space there to throw himself down, on the floor, against the wall, poor broken man, and let his tears flow as they would. He had shed so many tears here, long ago; that he was less ashamed of his weakness in this place than in any other—perhaps, with that consciousness, had made excuses to himself for coming here. Here, with stooping shoulders and his chin dropped on his breast, he had come. Here, thrown upon the bare boards, in the dead of night, he wept, alone—a proud man, even then; who, if a kind hand could have been stretched out, or a kind face could have looked in, would have risen up, and turned away, and gone down to his cell.

When the day broke he was shut up in his rooms again. He had meant to go away to-day, but clung to this tie in the house as the last and only thing left to him. He would go to-morrow. To-morrow came. He would go to-morrow. Every night, within the knowledge of no human creature, he came forth, and wandered through the despoiled house like a ghost. Many a morning, when the day broke, his altered face, drooping behind the closed blind in his window, im-

perfectly transparent to the light as yet, pondered on the loss of his two children. It was one child no more. He reunited them in his thoughts; and they were never asunder. Oh that he could have united them in his past love, and in death, and that one had not been so much worse than dead!

Strong mental agitation and disturbance was no novelty to him, even before his late sufferings. It never is to obstinate and sullen natures; for they struggle hard to be such. Ground, long undermined, will often fall down in a moment; what was undermined here in so many ways, weakened, and crumbled, little by little, more and more, as the hand moved on the dial.

At last he began to think he need not go at all. 'He might yet give up what his creditors had spared him (that they had not spared him more was his own act), and only sever the tie between him and the ruined house, by severing that other link——'

It was then that his footfall was audible in the late housekeeper's room, as he walked to and fro; but not audible in its true meaning, or it would have had an appalling sound.

The world was very busy and restless about him. He became aware of that again. It was whispering and babbling. It was never quiet. This, and the intricacy and complication of the footsteps, harassed him to death. Objects began to take a bleared and russet colour in his eyes. Dombey and Son was no more—his children no more. This must be thought of well to-morrow.

He thought of it to-morrow; and sitting thinking in his chair, saw, in the glass, from time to time, this picture:

A spectral, haggard, wasted likeness of himself brooded and brooded over the empty fire-place. Now it lifted up its head, examining the lines and hollows in its face; now hung it down again, and brooded afresh. Now it rose and walked about; now passed into the next room, and came back with something from the dressing-table in its breast. Now it was looking at the bottom of the door, and thinking.

—Hush! what?

It was thinking that if blood were to trickle that way, and to leak out into the hall, it must be a long time going so far. It would move so stealthily and slowly, creeping on, with here a lazy little pool, and there a start, and then another little pool, that a desperately-wounded man could only be discovered through its means, either dead or dying. When it had thought of this a long while, it got up again, and walked to and fro with its hand in its breast. He glanced

at it occasionally, very curious to watch its motions, and he marked how wicked and murderous that hand looked.

Now it was thinking again! What was it thinking?

Whether they would tread in the blood when it crept so far, and carry it about the house among those many prints of feet, or even out into the street.

It sat down, with its eyes upon the empty fire-place, and, as it lost itself in thought, there shone into the room a gleam of light; a ray of sun. It was quite unmindful, and sat thinking. Suddenly it rose, with a terrible face, and that guilty hand grasping what was in its breast. Then it was arrested by a cry—a wild, loud, piercing, loving, rapturous cry—and he only saw his own reflection in the glass, and at his knees his daughter.

Yes. His daughter. Look at her! Look here! Down upon the ground, clinging to him, calling to him, folding her hands, praying to him.

"Papa! Dearest papa! Pardon me, forgive me! I have come back to ask forgiveness on my knees. I never can be happy more, without it!"

Unchanged still. Of all the world, unchanged. Raising the same face to his as on that miserable night. Asking *his* forgiveness!

"Dear papa, oh, don't look strangely on me! I never meant to leave you. I never thought of it, before or afterwards. I was frightened when I went away, and could not think. Papa dear, I am changed. I am penitent. I know my fault. I know my duty better now. Papa, don't cast me off, or I shall die!"

He tottered to his chair. He felt her draw his arms about her neck; he felt her put her own round his; he felt her kisses on his face; he felt her wet cheek laid against his own; he felt—oh, how deeply!—all that he had done.

Upon the breast that he had bruised, against the heart that he had almost broken, she laid his face, now covered with his hands, and said, sobbing:

"Papa love, I am a mother. I have a child who will soon call Walter by the name by which I call you. When it was born, and when I knew how much I loved it, I knew what I had done in leaving you. Forgive me, dear papa! Oh, say God bless me, and my little child!"

He would have said it, if he could. He would have raised his hands and besought her for pardon, but she caught them in her own, and put them down, hurriedly.

"My little child was born at sea, papa. I prayed to God (and so did Walter for me) to

spare me, that I might come home. The moment I could land, I came back to you. Never let us be parted any more, papa. Never let us be parted any more!"

His head, now grey, was encircled by her arm; and he groaned to think that never, never had it rested so before.

"You will come home with me, papa, and see my baby. A boy, papa. His name is Paul. I think—I hope—he's like——"

Her tears stopped her.

"Dear papa, for the sake of my child, for the sake of the name we have given him, for my sake, pardon Walter. He is so kind and tender to me. I am so happy with him. It was not his fault that we were married. It was mine. I loved him so much."

She clung closer to him, more endearing and more earnest.

"He is the darling of my heart, papa. I would die for him. He will love and honour you as I will. We will teach our little child to love and honour you; and we will tell him, when he can understand, that you had a son of that name once, and that he died, and you were very sorry; but that he is gone to Heaven, where we all hope to see him when our time for resting comes. Kiss me, papa, as a promise that you will be reconciled to Walter—to my dearest husband—to the father of the little child who taught me to come back, papa. Who taught me to come back!"

As she clung closer to him, in another burst of tears, he kissed her on her lips, and, lifting up his eyes, said, "Oh, my God, forgive me, for I need it very much!"

With that he dropped his head again, lamenting over and caressing her, and there was not a sound in all the house for a long, long time; they remaining clasped in one another's arms, in the glorious sunshine that had crept in with Florence.

He dressed himself for going out, with a docile submission to her entreaty; and walking with a feeble gait, and looking back, with a tremble, at the room in which he had been so long shut up, and where he had seen the picture in the glass, passed out with her into the hall. Florence, hardly glancing round her, lest she should remind him freshly of their last parting—for their feet were on the very stones where he had struck her in his madness—and keeping close to him, with her eyes upon his face, and his arm about her, led him out to a coach that was waiting at the door, and carried him away.

Then, Miss Tox and Polly came out of their concealment, and exulted tearfully. And then

they packed his clothes, and books, and so forth, with great care; and consigned them in due course to certain persons sent by Florence in the evening to fetch them. And then they took a last cup of tea in the lonely house.

"And so Dombey and Son, as I observed upon a certain sad occasion," said Miss Tox, winding up a host of recollections, "is indeed a daughter, Polly, after all."

"And a good one!" exclaimed Polly.

"You are right," said Miss Tox; "and it's a credit to you, Polly, that you were always her friend when she was a little child. You were her friend long before I was, Polly," said Miss Tox; "and you're a good creature. Robin!"

Miss Tox addressed herself to a bullet-headed young man, who appeared to be in but indifferent circumstances, and in depressed spirits, and who was sitting in a remote corner. Rising, he disclosed to view the form and features of the Grinder.

"Robin," said Miss Tox, "I have just observed to your mother, as you may have heard, that she is a good creature."

"And so she is miss," quoth the Grinder with some feeling.

"Very well, Robin," said Miss Tox, "I am glad to hear you say so. Now, Robin, as I am going to give you a trial, at your urgent request, as my domestic, with a view to your restoration to respectability, I will take this impressive occasion of remarking that I hope you will never forget that you have, and have always had, a good mother, and that you will endeavour so to conduct yourself as to be a comfort to her."

"Upon my soul I will, miss," returned the Grinder. "I have come through a good deal, and my intentions is now as straightforward, miss, as a cove's——"

"I must get you to break yourself of that word, Robin, if you please," interposed Miss Tox politely.

"If you please, miss, as a chap's——"

"Thankee, Robin, no," returned Miss Tox. "I should prefer individual."

"As a indiwiddle's——" said the Grinder.

"Much better," remarked Miss Tox complacently; "infinitely more expressive!"

"—Can be," pursued Rob. "If I hadn't been and got made a Grinder on, miss and mother, which was a most unfortunate circumstance for a young co—indiwiddle——"

"Very good indeed," observed Miss Tox approvingly.

"—And if I hadn't been led away by birds, and then fallen into a bad service," said the

Grinder, "I hope I might have done better. But it's never too late for a——"

"Indi——" suggested Miss Tox.

"—widdle," said the Grinder, "to mend; and I hope to mend, miss, with your kind trial;

and wishing, mother, my love to father, and brothers and sisters, and saying of it."

"I am very glad indeed to hear it," observed Miss Tox. "Will you take a little bread-and-butter and a cup of tea before we go, Robin?"



"OH, MY GOD, FORGIVE ME, FOR I NEED IT VERY MUCH!"

"Thankee, miss," returned the Grinder; who immediately began to use his own personal grinders in a most remarkable manner, as if he had been on very short allowance for a considerable period.

Miss Tox being, in good time, bonneted and

shawled, and Polly too, Rob hugged his mother, and followed his new mistress away; so much to the hopeful admiration of Polly, that something in her eyes made luminous rings round the gas-lamps as she looked after him. Polly then put out her light, locked the house-door,

delivered the key at an agent's-hard by, and went home as fast as she could go; rejoicing in the shrill delight that her unexpected arrival would occasion there. The great house, dumb as to all that had been suffered in it, and the changes it had witnessed, stood frowning like a dark mute on the street; balking any nearer inquiries with the staring announcement that the lease of this desirable Family Mansion was to be disposed of.

CHAPTER LX.

CHIEFLY MATRIMONIAL.

THE grand half-yearly festival holden by Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, on which occasion they requested the pleasure of the company of every young gentleman pursuing his studies in that genteel establishment, at an early party, when the hour was half-past seven o'clock, and when the object was quadrilles, had duly taken place about this time; and the young gentlemen, with no unbecoming demonstrations of levity, had betaken themselves, in a state of scholastic repletion, to their own homes. Mr. Skettles had repaired abroad, permanently to grace the establishment of his father, Sir Barnet Skettles, whose popular manners had obtained him a diplomatic appointment, the honours of which were discharged by himself and Lady Skettles, to the satisfaction even of their own countrymen and countrywomen: which was considered almost miraculous. Mr. Tozer, now a young man of lofty stature, in Wellington boots, was so extremely full of antiquity as to be nearly on a par with a genuine ancient Roman in his knowledge of English: a triumph that affected his good parents with the tenderest emotions, and caused the father and mother of Mr. Briggs (whose learning, like ill-arranged luggage, was so tightly packed that he couldn't get at anything he wanted) to hide their diminished heads. The fruit laboriously gathered from the tree of knowledge by this latter young gentleman, in fact, had been subjected to so much pressure, that it had become a kind of intellectual Norfolk Biffin, and had nothing of its original form or flavour remaining. Master Bitherstone now, on whom the forcing system had the happier and not uncommon effect of leaving no impression whatever, when the forcing apparatus ceased to work, was in a much more comfortable plight; and being then on ship-

board, bound for Bengal, found himself forgetting, with such admirable rapidity, that it was doubtful whether his declensions of noun-substantives would hold out to the end of the voyage.

When Doctor Blimber, in pursuance of the usual course, would have said to the young gentlemen, on the morning of the party, "Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month," he departed from the usual course, and said, "Gentlemen, when our friend Cincinnatus retired to his farm, he did not present to the senate any Roman whom he sought to nominate as his successor. But there is a Roman here," said Doctor Blimber, laying his hand on the shoulder of Mr. Feeder, B.A., "*adolescens imprimis gravis et doctus*, gentlemen, whom I, a retiring Cincinnatus, wish to present to my little senate, as their future Dictator. Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month, under the auspices of Mr. Feeder, B.A." At this (which Doctor Blimber had previously called upon all the parents, and urbanely explained), the young gentlemen cheered; and Mr. Tozer, on behalf of the rest, instantly presented the Doctor with a silver inkstand, in a speech containing very little of the mother tongue, but fifteen quotations from the Latin, and seven from the Greek, which moved the younger of the young gentlemen to discontent and envy; they remarking, "Oh, ah! It was all very well for old Tozer, but they didn't subscribe money for old Tozer to show off with, they supposed; did they? What business was it of old Tozer's more than anybody else's? It wasn't *his* inkstand. Why couldn't he leave the boys' property alone?" and murmuring other expressions of their dissatisfaction, which seemed to find a greater relief in calling him old Tozer than in any other available vent.

Not a word had been said to the young gentlemen, nor a hint dropped, of anything like a contemplated marriage between Mr. Feeder, B.A., and the fair Cornelia Blimber. Doctor Blimber, especially, seemed to take pains to look as if nothing would surprise him more; but it was perfectly well known to all the young gentlemen, nevertheless, and, when they departed for the society of their relations and friends, they took leave of Mr. Feeder with awe.

Mr. Feeder's most romantic visions were fulfilled. The Doctor had determined to paint the house outside, and put it in thorough repair; and to give up the business, and to give up Cornelia. The painting and repairing began upon the very day of the young gentlemen's departure, and now, behold! the wedding morn-

ing was come, and Cornelia, in a new pair of spectacles, was waiting to be led to the hymeneal altar.

The Doctor with his learned legs, and Mrs. Blimber in a lilac bonnet, and Mr. Feeder, B.A., with his long knuckles and his bristly head of hair, and Mr. Feeder's brother, the Reverend Alfred Feeder, M.A., who was to perform the ceremony, were all assembled in the drawing-room, and Cornelia, with her orange-flowers and bridesmaids, had just come down, and looked, as of old, a little squeezed in appearance, but very charming, when the door opened, and the weak-eyed young man, in a loud voice, made the following proclamation:

"MR. AND MRS. TOOTS!"

Upon which there entered Mr. Toots, grown extremely stout, and on his arm a lady very handsomely and becomingly dressed, with very bright black eyes.

"Mrs. Blimber," said Mr. Toots, "allow me to present my wife."

Mrs. Blimber was delighted to receive her. Mrs. Blimber was a little condescending, but extremely kind.

"And as you've known me for a long time, you know," said Mr. Toots, "let me assure you that she is one of the most remarkable women that ever lived."

"My dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Toots.

"Upon my word and honour she is," said Mr. Toots. "I—I assure you, Mrs. Blimber, she's a most extraordinary woman."

Mrs. Toots laughed merrily, and Mrs. Blimber led her to Cornelia. Mr. Toots having paid his respects in that direction, and having saluted his old preceptor, who said, in allusion to his conjugal state, "Well, Toots, well, Toots! So you are one of us, are you, Toots?"—retired with Mr. Feeder, B.A., into a window.

Mr. Feeder, B.A., being in great spirits, made a spar at Mr. Toots, and tapped him skilfully with the back of his hand on the breast-bone.

"Well, old Buck!" said Mr. Feeder with a laugh. "Well! Here we are! Taken in and done for. Eh?"

"Feeder," returned Mr. Toots, "I give you joy. If you're as—as—as perfectly blissful in a matrimonial life as I am myself, you'll have nothing to desire."

"I don't forget my old friends, you see," said Mr. Feeder. "I ask 'em to my wedding, Toots."

"Feeder," replied Mr. Toots gravely, "the fact is, that there were several circumstances which prevented me from communicating with you until after my marriage had been solemnised. In the first place, I had made a perfect brute of

myself to you on the subject of Miss Dombey; and I felt that, if you were asked to any wedding of mine, you would naturally expect that it was *with* Miss Dombey, which involved explanations that, upon my word and honour, at that crisis, would have knocked me completely over. In the second place, our wedding was strictly private; there being nobody present but one friend of myself and Mrs. Toots's, who is a captain in—I don't exactly know in what," said Mr. Toots, "but it's of no consequence. I hope, Feeder, that in writing a statement of what had occurred before Mrs. Toots and myself went abroad upon our foreign tour, I fully discharged the offices of friendship."

"Toots, my boy," said Mr. Feeder, shaking hands, "I was joking."

"And now, Feeder," said Mr. Toots, "I should be glad to know what you think of my union."

"Capital!" returned Mr. Feeder.

"You think it's capital, do you, Feeder?" said Mr. Toots solemnly. "Then how capital must it be to Me! For *you* can never know what an extraordinary woman that is."

Mr. Feeder was willing to take it for granted. But Mr. Toots shook his head, and wouldn't hear of that being possible.

"You see," said Mr. Toots, "what I wanted in a wife was—in short, was sense. Money, Feeder, I had. Sense I—I had not, particularly."

Mr. Feeder murmured, "Oh yes, you had, Toots!" But Mr. Toots said:

"No, Feeder, I had *not*. Why should I disguise it? I had *not*. I knew that sense was There," said Mr. Toots, stretching out his hand towards his wife, "in perfect heaps. I had no relation to object, or be offended, on the score of station; for I had no relation. I have never had anybody belonging to me but my guardian, and him, Feeder, I have always considered as a Pirate and a Corsair. Therefore, you know, it was not likely," said Mr. Toots, "that I should take *his* opinion."

"No," said Mr. Feeder.

"Accordingly," resumed Mr. Toots, "I acted on my own. Bright was the day on which I did so! Feeder! Nobody but myself can tell what the capacity of that woman's mind is. If ever the Rights of Woman, and all that kind of thing, are properly attended to, it will be through her powerful intellect.—Susan, my dear!" said Mr. Toots, looking abruptly out of the window curtains. "Pray do not exert yourself!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Toots, "I was only talking."

"But, my love," said Mr. Toots, "pray do not exert yourself. You really must be careful. Do not, my dear Susan, exert yourself. She's so easily excited," said Mr. Toots, apart to Mrs. Blimber, "and then she forgets the medical man altogether."

Mrs. Blimber was impressing on Mrs. Toots the necessity of caution, when Mr. Feeder, B.A., offered her his arm, and led her down to the carriages that were in waiting to go to church. Doctor Blimber escorted Mrs. Toots. Mr. Toots escorted the fair bride, around whose lambent spectacles two gauzy little bridesmaids fluttered like moths. Mr. Feeder's brother, Mr. Alfred Feeder, M.A., had already gone on, in advance, to assume his official functions.

The ceremony was performed in an admirable manner. Cornelia, with her crisp little curls, "went in," as the Chicken might have said, with great composure; and Doctor Blimber gave her away like a man who had quite made up his mind to it. The gauzy little bridesmaids appeared to suffer most. Mrs. Blimber was affected, but gently so; and told the Reverend Mr. Alfred Feeder, M.A., on the way home, that if she could only have seen Cicero in his retirement at Tusculum, she would not have had a wish, now, ungratified.

There was a breakfast afterwards, limited to the same small party; at which the spirits of Mr. Feeder, B.A., were tremendous, and so communicated themselves to Mrs. Toots, that Mr. Toots was several times heard to observe, across the table, "My dear Susan, *don't* exert yourself!" The best of it was, that Mr. Toots felt it incumbent on him to make a speech; and, in spite of a whole code of telegraphic dissuasions from Mrs. Toots, appeared on his legs for the first time in his life.

"I really," said Mr. Toots, "in this house, where whatever was done to me in the way of—of any mental confusion sometimes—which is of no consequence, and I impute to nobody—I was always treated like one of Doctor Blimber's family, and had a desk to myself for a considerable period—can—not—allow my friend Feeder to be——"

Mrs. Toots suggested "married."

"It may not be inappropriate to the occasion, or altogether uninteresting," said Mr. Toots with a delighted face, "to observe that my wife is a most extraordinary woman, and would do this much better than myself—allow my friend Feeder to be married—especially to——"

Mrs. Toots suggested "to Miss Blimber."

"To Mrs. Feeder, my love!" said Mr. Toots in a subdued tone of private discussion: "whom

God hath joined," you know, "let no man—don't you know? I cannot allow my friend Feeder to be married—especially to Mrs. Feeder—without proposing their—their—Toasts; and may," said Mr. Toots, fixing his eyes on his wife, as if for inspiration in a high flight, "may the torch of Hymen be the beacon of joy, and may the flowers we have this day strewed in their path be the—the banishers of—of gloom!"

Doctor Blimber, who had a taste for metaphor, was pleased with this, and said, "Very good, Toots! Very well said indeed, Toots!" and nodded his head and patted his hands. Mr. Feeder made, in reply, a comic speech chequered with sentiment. Mr. Alfred Feeder, M.A., was afterwards very happy on Doctor and Mrs. Blimber; Mr. Feeder, B.A., scarcely less so, on the gauzy little bridesmaids. Doctor Blimber then, in a sonorous voice, delivered a few thoughts in the pastoral style, relative to the rushes among which it was the intention of himself and Mrs. Blimber to dwell, and the bee that would hum around their cot. Shortly after which, as the Doctor's eyes were twinkling in a remarkable manner, and his son-in-law had already observed that time was made for slaves, and had inquired whether Mrs. Toots sang, the discreet Mrs. Blimber dissolved the sitting, and sent Cornelia away, very cool and comfortable, in a post-chaise, with the man of her heart.

Mr. and Mrs. Toots withdrew to the Bedford (Mrs. Toots had been there before in old times, under her maiden name of Nipper), and there found a letter, which it took Mr. Toots such an enormous time to read, that Mrs. Toots was frightened.

"My dear Susan," said Mr. Toots, "fright is worse than exertion. Pray be calm!"

"Who is it from?" asked Mrs. Toots.

"Why, my love," said Mr. Toots, "it's from Captain Gills. Do not excite yourself. Walters and Miss Dombey are expected home!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Toots, raising herself quickly from the sofa, very pale, "don't try to deceive me, for it's no use, they're come home—I see it plainly in your face!"

"She's a most extraordinary woman!" exclaimed Mr. Toots in rapturous admiration. "You're perfectly right, my love, they have come home. Miss Dombey has seen her father, and they are reconciled!"

"Reconciled!" cried Mrs. Toots, clapping her hands.

"My dear," said Mr. Toots; "pray do not exert yourself. Do remember the medical man! Captain Gills says—at least, he don't say, but I imagine, from what I can make out, he means—"

that Miss Dombey has brought her unfortunate father away from his old house, to one where she and Walters are living; that he is lying very ill there—supposed to be dying; and that she attends upon him night and day."

Mrs. Toots began to cry quite bitterly.

"My dearest Susan," replied Mr. Toots, "do, do, if you possibly can, remember the medical man! If you can't, it's of no consequence—but do endeavour to!"

His wife, with her old manner suddenly restored, so pathetically entreated him to take her to her precious pet, her little mistress, her own darling, and the like, that Mr. Toots, whose sympathy and admiration were of the strongest kind, consented from his very heart of hearts; and they agreed to depart immediately, and present themselves in answer to the captain's letter.

Now, some hidden sympathies of things, or some coincidences, had that day brought the captain himself (toward whom Mr. and Mrs. Toots were soon journeying) into the flowery train of wedlock; not as a principal, but as an accessory. It happened accidentally, and thus:

The captain, having seen Florence and her baby for a moment, to his unbought content, and having had a long talk with Walter, turned out for a walk; feeling it necessary to have some solitary meditation on the changes of human affairs, and to shake his glazed hat profoundly over the fall of Mr. Dombey, for whom the generosity and simplicity of his nature were awakened in a lively manner. The captain would have been very low, indeed, on the unhappy gentleman's account, but for the recollection of the baby; which afforded him such intense satisfaction whenever it arose, that he laughed aloud as he went along the street, and, indeed, more than once, in a sudden impulse of joy, threw up his glazed hat and caught it again; much to the amazement of the spectators. The rapid alternations of light and shade to which these two conflicting subjects of reflection exposed the captain were so very trying to his spirits, that he felt a long walk necessary to his composure; and, as there is a great deal in the influence of harmonious associations, he chose, for the scene of this walk, his old neighbourhood, down among the mast, oar, and block makers, ship-biscuit bakers, coal-whippers, pitch-kettles, sailors, canals, docks, swing-bridges, and other soothing objects.

These peaceful scenes, and particularly the region of Limehouse Hole and thereabouts, were so influential in calming the captain, that he walked on with restored tranquillity, and, was, in fact, regaling himself, under his breath, with

the ballad of *Lovely Peg*, when, on turning a corner, he was suddenly transfixed and rendered speechless by a triumphant procession that he beheld advancing towards him.

This awful demonstration was headed by that determined woman Mrs. MacStinger, who, preserving a countenance of inexorable resolution, and wearing conspicuously attached to her obdurate bosom a stupendous watch and appendages, which the captain recognised at a glance as the property of Bunsby, conducted under her arm no other than that sagacious mariner; he, with the distraught and melancholy visage of a captive borne into a foreign land, meekly resigning himself to her will. Behind them appeared the young MacStingers, in a body, exulting. Behind them, two ladies of a terrible and steadfast aspect, leading between them a short gentleman in a tall hat, who likewise exulted. In the wake appeared Bunsby's boy, bearing umbrellas. The whole were in good marching order, and a dreadful smartness that pervaded the party would have sufficiently announced, if the intrepid countenances of the ladies had been wanting, that it was a procession of sacrifice, and that the victim was Bunsby.

The first impulse of the captain was to run away. This also appeared to be the first impulse of Bunsby, hopeless as its execution must have proved. But a cry of recognition proceeding from the party, and Alexander MacStinger running up to the captain with open arms, the captain struck.

"Well, Cap'en Cuttle!" said Mrs. MacStinger. "This is indeed a meeting! I bear no malice now. Cap'en Cuttle—you needn't fear that I'm a-going to cast any reflections. I hope to go to the altar in another spirit." Here Mrs. MacStinger paused, and drawing herself up, and inflating her bosom with a long breath, said, in allusion to the victim, "My 'usband, Cap'en Cuttle!"

The object Bunsby looked neither to the right nor to the left, nor at his bride, nor at his friend, but straight before him at nothing. The captain putting out his hand, Bunsby put out his; but, in answer to the captain's greeting, spake no word.

"Cap'en Cuttle," said Mrs. MacStinger, "if you would wish to heal up past animosities, and to see the last of your friend, my 'usband, as a single person, we should be 'appy of your company to chapel. Here is a lady here," said Mrs. MacStinger, turning round to the more intrepid of the two, "my bridesmaid, that will be glad of your protection, Cap'en Cuttle."

The short gentleman in the tall hat, who it

appeared was the husband of the other lady, and who evidently exulted at the reduction of a fellow-creature to his own condition, gave place at this, and resigned the lady to Captain Cuttle. The lady immediately seized him, and, observing that there was no time to lose, gave the word, in a strong voice, to advance.

The captain's concern for his friend, not unmingled, at first, with some concern for himself—for a shadowy terror that he might be married by violence possessed him, until his knowledge of the service came to his relief, and remembering the legal obligation of saying, "I will," he felt himself personally safe so long as he resolved, if asked any question, distinctly to reply "I won't"—threw him into a profuse perspiration; and rendered him, for a time, insensible to the movements of the procession, of which he now formed a feature, and to the conversation of his fair companion. But, as he became less agitated, he learnt from this lady that she was the widow of a Mr. Bokum, who had held an employment in the Custom House; that she was the dearest friend of Mrs. MacStinger, whom she considered a pattern for her sex; that she had often heard of the captain, and now hoped he had repented of his past life; that she trusted Mr. Bunsby knew what a blessing he had gained, but that she feared men seldom did know what such blessings were until they had lost them; with more to the same purpose.

All this time the captain could not but observe that Mrs. Bokum kept her eyes steadily on the bridegroom, and that, whenever they came near a court or other narrow turning which appeared favourable for flight, she was on the alert to cut him off if he attempted escape. The other lady, too, as well as her husband, the short gentleman with the tall hat, were plainly on guard, according to a preconceived plan; and the wretched man was so secured by Mrs. MacStinger, that any effort at self-preservation by flight was rendered futile. This, indeed, was apparent to the mere populace, who expressed their perception of the fact by jeers and cries; to all of which the dread MacStinger was inflexibly indifferent, while Bunsby himself appeared in a state of unconsciousness.

The captain made many attempts to accost the philosopher, if only in a monosyllable or a signal; but always failed, in consequence of the vigilance of the guard, and the difficulty, at all times peculiar to Bunsby's constitution, of having his attention aroused by any outward and visible sign whatever. Thus they approached the chapel, a neat whitewashed edifice, recently engaged by

the Reverend Melchisedech Howler, who had consented, on very urgent solicitation, to give the world another two years of existence, but had informed his followers that, then, it must positively go.

While the Reverend Melchisedech was offering up some extemporary orisons, the captain found an opportunity of growling in the bridegroom's ear:

"What cheer, my lad, what cheer?"

To which Bunsby replied, with a forgetfulness of the Reverend Melchisedech, which nothing but his desperate circumstances could have excused:

"D—d bad."

"Jack Bunsby," whispered the captain, "do you do this here o' your own free-will?"

Mr. Bunsby answered "No."

"Why do you do it, then, my lad?" inquired the captain, not unnaturally.

Bunsby, still looking, and always looking with an immovable countenance, at the opposite side of the world, made no reply.

"Why not sheer off?" said the captain.

"Eh?" whispered Bunsby, with a momentary gleam of hope.

"Sheer off," said the captain.

"Where's the good?" retorted the forlorn sage. "She'd capter me again."

"Try!" replied the captain. "Cheer up! Come! Now's your time. Sheer off, Jack Bunsby!"

Jack Bunsby, however, instead of profiting by the advice, said in a doleful whisper:

"It all began in 'that there chest o' yourn. Why did I ever conwov her into port that night?"

"My lad," faltered the captain, "I thought as you had come over her; not as she had come over you. A man as has got such opinions as you have!"

Mr. Bunsby merely uttered a suppressed groan.

"Come!" said the captain, nudging him with his elbow, "now's your time! Sheer off! I'll cover your retreat. The time's a flying. Bunsby! It's for liberty. Will you once?"

Bunsby was immovable.

"Bunsby!" whispered the captain, "will you twice?"

Bunsby wouldn't twice.

"Bunsby!" urged the captain, "it's for liberty. Will you three times? Now or never!"

Bunsby didn't then, and didn't ever; for Mrs. MacStinger immediately afterwards married him.

One of the most frightful circumstances of the ceremony, to the captain, was the deadly interest exhibited therein by Juliana MacStinger; and

the fatal concentration of her faculties, with which that promising child, already the image of her parent, observed the whole proceedings. The captain saw in this a succession of man-traps stretching out infinitely; a series of ages of oppression and coercion, through which the seafaring line was doomed. It was a more memorable sight than the unflinching steadiness of Mrs. Bokum and the other lady, the exultation of the short gentleman in the tall hat, or even the fell inflexibility of Mrs. MacStinger. The Master MacStingers understood little of what was going on, and cared less; being chiefly engaged, during the ceremony, in treading on one another's half-boots; but the contrast afforded by those wretched infants only set off and adorned the precocious woman in Juliana. Another year or two, the captain thought, and to lodge where that child was would be destruction.

The ceremony was concluded by a general spring of the young family on Mr. Bunsby, whom they hailed by the endearing name of father, and from whom they solicited halfpence. These gushes of affection over, the procession was about to issue forth again, when it was delayed for some little time by an unexpected transport on the part of Alexander MacStinger. That dear child, it seemed, connecting a chapel with tombstones, when it was entered for any purpose apart from the ordinary religious exercises, could not be persuaded but that his mother was now to be decently interred, and lost to him for ever. In the anguish of this conviction, he screamed with astonishing force, and turned black in the face. However touching these marks of a tender disposition were to his mother, it was not in the character of that remarkable woman to permit her recognition of them to degenerate into weakness. Therefore, after vainly endeavouring to convince his reason by shakes, pokes, bawling-out, and similar applications to his head, she led him into the air, and tried another method; which was manifested to the marriage party by a quick succession of sharp sounds, resembling applause, and subsequently by their seeing Alexander in contact with the coolest paving stone in the court, greatly flushed, and loudly lamenting.

The procession being then in a condition to form itself once more, and repair to Brig Place, where a marriage feast was in readiness, returned as it had come; not without the receipt, by Bunsby, of many humorous congratulations from the populace on his recently-acquired happiness. The captain accompanied it as far as the house-door, but, being made uneasy by the gentler manner of Mrs. Bokum, who, now that she was

relieved from her engrossing duty—for the watchfulness and alacrity of the ladies sensibly diminished when the bridegroom was safely married—had greater leisure to show an interest in his behalf, there left it and the captive; faintly pleading an appointment and promising to return presently. The captain had another cause for uneasiness, in remorsefully reflecting that he had been the first means of Bunsby's entrapment, though certainly without intending it, and through his unbounded faith in the resources of that philosopher.

To go back to old Sol Gills at the Wooden Midshipman's, and not first go round to ask how Mr. Dombey was—albeit the house where he lay was out of London, and away on the borders of a fresh heath—was quite out of the captain's course. So he got a lift when he was tired, and made out the journey gaily.

The blinds were pulled down, and the house so quiet, that the captain was almost afraid to knock; but, listening at the door, he heard low voices within, very near it, and, knocking softly, was admitted by Mr. Toots. Mr. Toots and his wife had, in fact, just arrived there; having been at the Midshipman's to seek him, and having there obtained the address.

They were not so recently arrived but that Mrs. Toots had caught the baby from somebody, taken it in her arms, and sat down on the stairs, hugging and fondling it. Florence was stooping down beside her; and no one could have said which Mrs. Toots was hugging and fondling most, the mother or the child, or which was the tenderer, Florence of Mrs. Toots, or Mrs. Toots of her, or both of the baby; it was such a little group of love and agitation.

"And is your pa very ill, thy darling dear Miss Floy?" asked Susan.

"He is very, very ill," said Florence. "But, Susan dear, you must not speak to me as you used to speak. And what's this?" said Florence, touching her clothes, in amazement. "Your old dress, dear? Your old cap, curls, and all?"

Susan burst into tears, and showered kisses on the little hand that had touched her so wonderingly.

"My dear Miss Dombey," said Mr. Toots, stepping forward, "I'll explain. She's the most extraordinary woman. There are not many to equal her! She has always said—she said before we were married, and has said to this day—that whenever you came home, she'd come to you in no dress but the dress she used to serve you in, for fear she might seem strange to you, and you might like her less. I admire the dress myself,"

said Mr. Toots, "of all things. I adore her in it! My dear Miss Dombey, she'll be your maid again, your nurse, all that she ever was, and more. There's no change in her. But Susan, my dear," said Mr. Toots, who had spoken with great feeling and high admiration, "all I ask is, that you'll remember the medical man and not exert yourself too much!"

CHAPTER LXI.

RELENTING.

FLORENCE had need of help. Her father's need of it was sore, and made the aid of her old friend invaluable. Death stood at his pillow. A shade, already, of what he had been, shattered in mind, and perilously sick in body, he laid his weary head down on the bed his daughter's hands prepared for him, and had never raised it since.

She was always with him. He knew her generally; though, in the wandering of his brain, he often confused the circumstances under which he spoke to her. Thus he would address her, sometimes, as if his boy were newly dead; and would tell her, that although he had said nothing of her ministering at the little bedside, yet he had seen it—he had seen it; and then would hide his face and sob, and put out his worn hand. Sometimes he would ask her for herself. "Where is Florence?" "I am here, papa, I am here." "I don't know her!" he would cry. "We have been parted so long, that I don't know her!" and then a staring dread would be upon him, until she could soothe his perturbation; and recall the tears she tried so hard, at other times, to dry.

He rambled through the scenes of his old pursuits—through many where Florence lost him as she listened—sometimes for hours. He would repeat that childish question, "What is money?" and ponder on it, and think about it, and reason with himself, more or less connectedly, for a good answer; as if it had never been proposed to him until that moment. He would go on with a musing repetition of the title of his old firm twenty thousand times, and, at every one of them, would turn his head upon his pillow. He would count his children—one—two—stop, and go back, and begin again in the same way.

But this was when his mind was in its most distracted state. In all the other phases of its illness, and in those to which it was most con-

stant, it always turned on Florence. What he would oftenest do was this: he would recall that night he had so recently remembered, the night on which she came down to his room, and would imagine that his heart smote him, and that he went out after her, and up the stairs to seek her. Then, confounding that time with the later days of the many footsteps, he would be amazed at their number, and begin to count them as he followed her. Here, of a sudden, was a bloody footstep going on among the others: and after it there began to be, at intervals, doors standing open, through which certain terrible pictures were seen, in mirrors, of haggard men, concealing something in their breasts. Still, among the many footsteps, and the bloody footsteps here and there, was the step of Florence. Still she was going on before. Still the restless mind went, following and counting, ever farther, ever higher, as to the summit of a mighty tower that it took years to climb.

One day he inquired if that were not Susan who had spoken a long while ago.

Florence said, "Yes, dear papa;" and asked him would he like to see her?

He said, "Very much." And Susan, with no little trepidation, showed herself at his bedside.

It seemed a great relief to him. He begged her not to go; to understand that he forgave her what she had said; and that she was to stay. Florence and he were very different now, he said, and very happy. Let her look at this! He meant his drawing the gentle head down to his pillow, and laying it beside him.

He remained like this for days and weeks. At length, lying the faint, feeble semblance of a man, upon his bed, and speaking in a voice so low that they could only hear him by listening very near to his lips, he became quiet. It was dimly pleasant to him now to lie there, with the window open, looking out at the summer sky and the trees; and, in the evening, at the sunset. To watch the shadows of the clouds and leaves, and seem to feel a sympathy with shadows. It was natural that he should. To him, life and the world were nothing else.

He began to show now that he thought of Florence's fatigue; and often taxed his weakness to whisper to her, "Go and walk, my dearest, in the sweet air. Go to your good husband!" One time, when Walter was in his room, he beckoned him to come near, and to stoop down; and, pressing his hand, whispered an assurance to him that he knew he could trust him with his child when he was dead.

It chanced one evening, towards sunset, when Florence and Walter were sitting in his room

together, as he liked to see them, that Florence, having her baby in her arms, began in a low voice to sing to the little fellow, and sang the old time she had so often sung to the dead child. He could not bear it at the time; he held up his trembling hand, imploring her to stop; but next day he asked her to repeat it, and to do so often of an evening: which she did. He listening, with his face turned away.

Florence was sitting on a certain time by his window, with her work-basket between her and her old attendant, who was still her faithful companion. He had fallen into a doze. It was a beautiful evening, with two hours of light to come yet; and the tranquillity and quiet made Florence very thoughtful. She was lost to everything for the moment, but the occasion when the so-altered figure on the bed had first presented her to her beautiful mamma; when a touch from Walter, leaning on the back of her chair, made her start.

"My dear," said Walter, "there is some one down-stairs who wishes to speak to you."

She fancied Walter looked grave, and asked him if anything had happened.

"No, no, my love!" said Walter. "I have seen the gentleman myself, and spoken with him. Nothing has happened. Will you come?"

Florence put her arm through his, and confiding her father to the black-eyed Mrs. Toots, who sat as brisk and smart at her work as black-eyed woman could, accompanied her husband down-stairs. In the pleasant little parlour opening on the garden sat a gentleman, who rose to advance towards her when she came in, but turned off, by reason of some peculiarity in his legs, and was only stopped by the table.

Florence then remembered Cousin Feenix, whom she had not at first recognised in the shade of the leaves. Cousin Feenix took her hand, and congratulated her upon her marriage.

"I could have wished, I am sure," said Cousin Feenix, sitting down as Florence sat, "to have had an earlier opportunity of offering my congratulations; but, in point of fact, so many painful occurrences have happened, treading, as a man may say, on one another's heels, that I have been in a devil of a state myself, and perfectly unfit for every description of society. The only description of society I have kept has been my own; and it certainly is anything but flattering to a man's good opinion of his own resources to know that, in point of fact, he has the capacity of boring himself to a perfectly unlimited extent."

Florence divined, from some indefinable constraint and anxiety in this gentleman's manner—

which was always a gentleman's, in spite of the harmless little eccentricities that attached to it—and from Walter's manner no less, that something more immediately tending to some object was to follow this.

"I have been mentioning to my friend Mr. Gay, if I may be allowed to have the honour of calling him so," said Cousin Feenix, "that I am rejoiced to hear that my friend Dombey is very decidedly mending. I trust my friend Dombey will not allow his mind to be, too much preyed upon by any mere loss of fortune. I cannot say that I have ever experienced any very great loss of fortune myself: never having had, in point of fact, any great amount of fortune to lose. But as much as I could lose, I have lost; and I don't find that I particularly care about it. I know my friend Dombey to be a devilish honourable man; and it's calculated to console my friend Dombey very much to know that this is the universal sentiment. Even Tommy Screwzer—a man of an extremely bilious habit, with whom my friend Gay is probably acquainted—cannot say a syllable in disputation of the fact."

Florence felt, more than ever, that there was something to come; and looked earnestly for it. So earnestly, that Cousin Feenix answered as if she had spoken.

"The fact is," said Cousin Feenix, "that my friend Gay and myself have been discussing the propriety of entreating a favour at your hands; and that I have the consent of my friend Gay—who has met me in an exceedingly kind and open manner, for which I am very much indebted to him—to solicit it. I am sensible that so amiable a lady as the lovely and accomplished daughter of my friend Dombey will not require much urging; but I am happy to know that I am supported by my friend Gay's influence and approval. As, in my parliamentary time, when a man had a motion to make of any sort—which happened seldom in those days, for we were kept very tight in hand, the leaders on both sides being regular martinets, which was a devilish good thing for the rank and file, like myself, and prevented our exposing ourselves continually, as a great many of us had a feverish anxiety to do—as, in my parliamentary time, I was about to say, when a man had leave to let off any little private pop-gun, it was always considered a great point for him to say that he had the happiness of believing that his sentiments were not without an echo in the breast of Mr. Pitt; the pilot, in point of fact, who had weathered the storm. Upon which, a devilish large number of fellows immediately cheered, and put him in spirits.

Though the fact is, that these fellows, being under orders to cheer most excessively whenever Mr. Pitt's name was mentioned, became so proficient that it always woke 'em. And they were so entirely innocent of what was going on, otherwise, that it used to be commonly said by Conversation Brown—four-bottle man at the Treasury Board, with whom the father of my friend Gay was probably acquainted, for it was before my friend Gay's time—that if a man had risen in his place, and said that he regretted to inform the House that there was an honourable member in the last stage of convulsions in the Lobby, and that the honourable member's name was Pitt, the approbation would have been vociferous."

This postponement of the point put Florence in a flutter; and she looked from Cousin Feenix to Walter, in increasing agitation.

"My love," said Walter, "there is nothing the matter."

"There is nothing the matter, upon my honour," said Cousin Feenix; "and I am deeply distressed at being the means of causing you a moment's uneasiness. I beg to assure you that there is nothing the matter. The favour that I have to ask is, simply—but it really does seem so exceedingly singular, that I should be in the last degree obliged to my friend Gay if he would have the goodness to break the—in point of fact, the ice," said Cousin Feenix.

Walter, thus appealed to, and appealed to no less in the look that Florence turned towards him, said

"My dearest, it is no more than this. That you will ride to London with this gentleman, whom you know."

"And my friend Gay also—I beg your pardon!" interrupted Cousin Feenix.

"—And with me—and make a visit somewhere."

"To whom?" asked Florence, looking from one to the other.

"If I might entreat," said Cousin Feenix, "that you would not press for an answer to that question, I would venture to take the liberty of making the request."

"Do you know, Walter?" said Florence.

"Yes."

"And think it right?"

"Yes. Only because I am sure that you would, too. Though there may be reasons I very well understand, which make it better that nothing more should be said beforehand."

"If papa is still asleep, or can spare me if he is awake, I will go immediately," said Florence. And rising quietly, and glancing at them with a

look that was a little alarmed, but perfectly confiding, left the room.

When she came back, ready to bear them company, they were talking together gravely at the window; and Florence could not but wonder what the topic was that had made them so well acquainted in so short a time. She did not wonder at the look of pride and love with which her husband broke off as she entered: for she never saw him but that rested on her.

"I will leave," said Cousin Feenix, "a card for my friend Dombey, sincerely trusting that he will pick up health and strength with every returning hour. And I hope my friend Dombey will do me the favour to consider me a man who has a devilish warm admiration of his character, as, in point of fact, a British merchant and a devilish upright gentleman. My place in the country is in a most confounded state of dilapidation, but if my friend Dombey should require a change of air, and would take up his quarters there, he would find it a remarkably healthy spot—as it need be, for it's amazingly dull. If my friend Dombey suffers from bodily weakness, and would allow me to recommend what has frequently done myself good, as a man who has been extremely queer at times, and who lived pretty freely in the days when men lived very freely, I should say, let it be, in point of fact, the yolk of an egg, beat up with sugar and nutmeg, in a glass of sherry, and taken in the morning, with a slice of dry toast. Jackson, who kept the boxing-rooms in Bond Street—man of very superior qualifications, with whose reputation my friend Gay is no doubt acquainted—used to mention that in training for the ring they substituted rum for sherry. I should recommend sherry in this case, on account of my friend Dombey being in an invalid condition; which might occasion rum to fly—in point of fact, to his head—and throw him into a devil of a state."

Of all this Cousin Feenix delivered himself with an obviously nervous and discomposed air. Then, giving his arm to Florence, and putting the strongest possible constraint upon his wilful legs, which seemed determined to go out into the garden, he led her to the door, and handed her into a carriage that was ready for her reception.

Walter entered after him, and they drove away.

Their ride was six or eight miles long. When they drove through certain dull and stately streets, lying westward in London, it was growing dusk. Florence had, by this time, put her hand in Walter's; and was looking very ear-

nestly, and with increasing agitation, into every new street into which they turned.

When the carriage stopped, at last, before that house in Brook Street, where her father's unhappy marriage had been celebrated, Florence said, "Walter, what is this? Who is here?" Walter cheering her, and not replying, she glanced up at the house-front, and saw that all the windows were shut, as if it were uninhabited. Cousin Feenix had by this time alighted, and was offering his hand.

"Are you not coming, Walter?"

"No, I will remain here. Don't tremble! there is nothing to fear, dearest Florence."

"I know that, Walter, with you so near. I am sure of that, but——"

The door was softly opened without any knock, and Cousin Feenix led her out of the summer-evening air into the close dull house. More sombre and brown than ever, it seemed to have been shut up from the wedding-day, and to have hoarded darkness and sadness ever since.

Florence ascended the dusky staircase trembling; and stopped with her conductor at the drawing-room door. He opened it without speaking, and signed an entreaty to her to advance into the inner room, while he remained there. Florence, after hesitating an instant, complied.

Sitting by the window at a table, where she seemed to have been writing or drawing, was a lady, whose head, turned away towards the dying light, was resting on her hand. Florence advancing, doubtfully, all at once stood still, as if she had lost the power of motion. The lady turned her head.

"Great Heaven!" she said, "what is this?"

"No, no!" cried Florence, shrinking back as she rose up, and putting out her hands to keep her off. "Mamma!"

They stood looking at each other. Passion and pride had worn it, but it was the face of Edith, and beautiful and stately yet. It was the face of Florence, and, through all the terrified avoidance it expressed, there was pity in it, sorrow, a grateful tender memory. On each face wonder and fear were painted vividly; each, so still and silent, looking at the other over the black gulf of the irrevocable past.

Florence was the first to change. Bursting into tears, she said, from her full heart, "Oh, mamma, mamma! why do we meet like this? Why were you ever kind to me when there was no one else, that we should meet like this?"

Edith stood before her, dumb and motionless. Her eyes were fixed upon her face.

"I dare not think of that," said Florence. "I

am come from papa's sick bed. We are never asunder now; we never shall be any more. If you would have me ask his pardon, I will do it, mamma. I am almost sure he will grant it now; if I ask him. May Heaven grant it to you too, and comfort you!"

She answered not a word.

"Walter—I am married to him, and we have a son," said Florence timidly—"is at the door, and has brought me here. I will tell him that you are repentant; that you are changed," said Florence, looking mournfully upon her; "and he will speak to papa with me, I know. Is there anything but this that I can do?"

Edith, breaking her silence, without moving eye or limb, answered slowly:

"The stain upon your name, upon your husband's, on your child's. Will that ever be forgiven, Florence?"

"Will it ever be, mamma? It is! Freely, freely, both by Walter and by me. If that is any consolation to you, there is nothing that you may believe more certainly. You do not—you do not," faltered Florence, "speak of papa; but I am sure you wish that I should ask him for his forgiveness. I am sure you do."

She answered not a word.

"I will!" said Florence. "I will bring it you, if you will let me; and then, perhaps, we may take leave of each other more like what we used to be to one another. I have, not," said Florence very gently, and drawing nearer to her. "I have not shrunk back from you, mamma, because I fear you, or because I dread to be disgraced by you. I only wish to do my duty to papa. I am very dear to him, and he is very dear to me. But I never can forget that you were very good to me. Oh, pray to Heaven," cried Florence, falling on her bosom, "pray to Heaven, mamma, to forgive you all this sin and shame, and to forgive me if I cannot help doing this (if it is wrong), when I remember what you used to be!"

Edith, as if she fell beneath her touch, sunk down on her knees, and caught her round the neck.

"Florence!" she cried. "My better angel! Before I am mad again, before my stubbornness comes back and strikes me dumb, believe me, upon my soul, I am innocent."

"Mamma!"

"Guilty of much! Guilty of that which sets a waste between us evermore. Guilty of what must separate me, through the whole remainder of my life, from purity and innocence—from you, of all the earth. Guilty of a blind and passionate resentment, of which I do not, cannot, will not,

even now, repent, but not guilty with that dead man. Before God!"

Upon her knees upon the ground, she held up both her hands and swore it.

"Florence!" she said, "purest and best of natures—whom I love—who might have changed me long ago, and did for a time work some change even in the woman that I am—believe me, I am innocent of that; and once more, on my desolate heart, let me lay this dear head, for the last time!"

She was moved and weeping. Had she been oftener thus in older days, she had been happier now.

"There is nothing else in all the world," she said, "that would have wrung denial from me. No love, no hatred, no hope, no threat. I said that I would die, and make no sign; I could have done so, and I would, if we had never met, Florence."

"I trust," said Cousin Feenix, ambling in at the door, and speaking half in the room; and half out of it, "that my lovely and accomplished relative will excuse my having, by a little stratagem, effected this meeting. I cannot say that I was, at first, wholly incredulous as to the possibility of my lovely and accomplished relative having, very unfortunately, committed herself with the deceased person with white teeth; because, in point of fact, one does see, in this world—which is remarkable for devilish strange arrangements, and for being decidedly the most unintelligible thing within a man's experience—very odd conjunctions of that sort. But, as I mentioned to my friend Dombey, I could not admit the criminality of my lovely and accomplished relative until it was perfectly established. And feeling, when the deceased person was, in point of fact, destroyed in a devilish horrible manner, that her position was a very painful one—and feeling, besides, that our family had been a little to blame in not paying more attention to her, and that we are a careless family—and also that my aunt, though a devilish lively woman, had perhaps not been the very best of mothers—I took the liberty of seeking her in France, and offering her such protection as a man very much out at elbows could offer. Upon which occasion my lovely and accomplished relative did me the honour to express that she believed I was, in my way, a devilish good sort of fellow; and that therefore she put herself under my protection. Which, in point of fact, I understood to be a kind thing on the part of my lovely and accomplished relative, as I am getting extremely shaky, and have derived great comfort from her solicitude."

Edith, who had taken Florence to a sofa, made a gesture with her hand, as if she would have begged him to say no more.

"My lovely and accomplished relative," resumed Cousin Feenix, still ambling about at the door, "will excuse me if, for her satisfaction and my own, and that of my friend Dombey, whose lovely and accomplished daughter we so much admire, I complete the thread of my observations. She will remember that, from the first, she and I have never alluded to the subject of her elopement. My impression, certainly, has always been that there was a mystery in the affair which she could explain, if so inclined. But my lovely and accomplished relative being a devilish resolute woman, I knew that she was not, in point of fact, to be trifled with, and therefore did not involve myself in any discussions. But, observing lately that her accessible point did appear to be a very strong description of tenderness for the daughter of my friend Dombey, it occurred to me that if I could bring about a meeting, unexpected on both sides, it might lead to beneficial results. Therefore, we being in London, in the present private way, before going to the South of Italy, there to establish ourselves, in point of fact, until we go to our long homes, which is a devilish disagreeable reflection for a man, I applied myself to the discovery of the residence of my friend Gay—handsome man, of an uncommonly frank disposition, who is probably known to my lovely and accomplished relative—and had the happiness of bringing his amiable wife to the present place. And now," said Cousin Feenix, with a real and genuine earnestness shining through the levity of his manner and his slipshod speech, "I do conjure my relative not to stop half-way, but to set right, as far as she can, whatever she has done wrong—not for the honour of her family, not for her own fame, not for any of those considerations which unfortunate circumstances have induced her to regard as hollow, and, in point of fact, as approaching to humbug—but because it *is* wrong, and not right."

Cousin Feenix's legs consented to take him away after this; and leaving them alone together, he shut the door.

Edith remained silent for some minutes, with Florence sitting close beside her. Then she took from her bosom a sealed paper.

"I debated with myself a long time," she said in a low voice, "whether to write this at all, in case of dying suddenly or by accident, and feeling the want of it upon me. I have deliberated, ever since, when and how to destroy it. Take it, Florence. The truth is written in it."

"Is it for papa?" asked Florence.

"It is for whom you will," she answered. "It is given to you, and is obtained by you. He never could have had it otherwise."

Again they sat silent in the deepening darkness.

"Mamma," said Florence, "he has lost his

fortune; he has been at the point of death; he may not recover, even now. Is there any word that I shall say to him from you?"

"Did you tell me," asked Edith, "that you were very dear to him?"

"Yes!" said Florence in a thrilling voice.



"NO, NO!" CRIED FLORENCE, SHRINKING BACK AS SHE ROSE UP, AND PUTTING OUT HER HANDS TO KEEP HER OFF. "MAMMA!"

"Tell him I am sorry that we ever met."

"No more?" said Florence after a pause.

"Tell him, if he asks, that I do not repent of what I have done—not yet—for if it were to do again to-morrow, I should do it. But if he is a changed man——"

She stopped. There was something in the silent touch of Florence's hand that stopped her.

"—But that, being a changed man, he knows, now, it would never be. Tell him I wish it never had been."

"May I say," said Florence, "that you grieved to hear of the afflictions he has suffered?"

"Not," she replied, "if they have taught him that his daughter is very dear to him. He will not grieve for them himself, one day, if they have brought that lesson, Florence."

"You wish well to him, and would have him happy. I am sure you would!" said Florence. "Oh! let me be able, if I have the occasion at some future time, to say so!"

Edith sat with her dark eyes gazing steadfastly before her, and did not reply until Florence had repeated her entreaty; when she drew her hand within her arm, and said, with the same thoughtful gaze upon the night outside:

"Tell him that if, in his own present, he can find any reason to compassionate my past, I sent word that I asked him to do so. Tell him that if, in his own present, he can find a reason to think less bitterly of me, I asked him to do so. Tell him that, dead as we are to one another, never more to meet on this side of eternity, he knows there is one feeling in common between us now, that there never was before."

Her sternness seemed to yield, and there were tears in her dark eyes.

"I trust myself to that," she said, "for his better thoughts of me, and mine of him. When he loves his Florence most, he will hate me least. When he is most proud and happy in her and her children, he will be most repentant of his own part in the dark vision of our married life. At that time I will be repentant too—let him know it then—and think that when I thought so much of all the causes that had made me what I was, I needed to have allowed more for the causes that had made him what he was. I will try, then, to forgive him his share of blame. Let him try to forgive me mine!"

"Oh, mamma!" said Florence, "how it lightens my heart, even in such a meeting and parting, to hear this!"

"Strange words in my own ears," said Edith, "and foreign to the sound of my own voice! But even if I had been the wretched creature I have given him occasion to believe me, I think I could have said them still, hearing that you and he were very dear to one another. Let him, when you are dearest, ever feel that he is most forbearing in his thoughts of me—that I am most forbearing in my thoughts of him! Those are the last words I send him! Now, good-bye, my life!"

She clasped her in her arms, and seemed to pour out all her woman's soul of love and tenderness at once.

"This kiss for your child! These kisses for

a blessing on your head! My own dear Florence, my sweet girl, farewell!"

"To meet again!" cried Florence.

"Never again! Never again! When you leave me in this dark room, think that you have left me in the grave. Remember only that I was once, and that I loved you!"

And Florence left her, seeing her face no more, but accompanied by her embraces and caresses to the last.

Cousin Feenix met her at the door, and took her down to Walter in the dingy dining-room, upon whose shoulder she laid her head, weeping.

"I am devilish sorry," said Cousin Feenix, lifting his wristbands to his eyes in the simplest manner possible, and without the least concealment, "that the lovely and accomplished daughter of my friend Dombey and amiable wife of my friend Gay, should have had her sensitive nature so very much distressed and cut up by the interview which is just concluded. But I hope and trust I have acted for the best, and that my honourable friend Dombey will find his mind relieved by the disclosures which have taken place. I exceedingly lament that my friend Dombey should have got himself, in point of fact, into the devil's own state of conglomeration by an alliance with our family; but am strongly of opinion that if it hadn't been for the infernal scoundrel Barker—man with white teeth—everything would have gone on pretty smoothly. In regard to my relative who does me the honour to have formed an uncommonly good opinion of myself, I can assure the amiable wife of my friend Gay that she may rely on my being, in point of fact, a father to her. And in regard to the changes of human life, and the extraordinary manner in which we are perpetually conducting ourselves, all I can say is, with my friend Shakspeare—man who wasn't for an age, but for all time, and with whom my friend Gay is no doubt acquainted—that it's like the shadow of a dream."

CHAPTER LXII.

FINAL.



BOTTLE that has been long excluded from the light of day, and is hoary with dust and cobwebs, has been brought into the sunshine; and the golden wine within it sheds a lustre on the table.

It is the last bottle of the old madeira.

"You are quite right Mr. Gills," says Mr.

Dombey. "This is a very rare and most delicious wine."

The captain, who is of the party, beams with joy. There is a very halo of delight round his glowing forehead.

"We always promised ourselves, sir," observes Mr. Gills, "Ned and myself, I mean——"

Mr. Dombey nods at the captain, who shines more and more with speechless gratification.

"—That we would drink this, one day or other, to Walter safe at home: though such a home we never thought of. If you don't object to our old whim, sir, let us devote this first glass to Walter and his wife."

"To Walter and his wife!" says Mr. Dombey. "Florence, my child——" and turns to kiss her.

"To Walter and his wife!" says Mr. Toots.

"To Wal'r and his wife!" exclaims the captain. "Hooroar!" and the captain exhibiting a strong desire to clink his glass against some other glass, Mr. Dombey, with a ready hand, holds out his. The others follow; and there is a blithe and merry ringing, as of a little peal of marriage bells.

Other buried wine grows older, as the old madeira did in its time; and dust and cobwebs thicken on the bottles.

Mr. Dombey is a white-haired gentleman, whose face bears heavy marks of care and suffering; but they are traces of a storm that has passed on for ever, and left a clear evening in its track.

Ambitious projects trouble him no more. His only pride is in his daughter and her husband. He has a silent, thoughtful, quiet manner, and is always with his daughter. Miss Tox is not unfrequently of the family party, and is quite devoted to it, and a great favourite. Her admiration of her once stately patron is, and has been ever since the morning of her shock in Princess's Place, Platonic, but not weakened in the least.

Nothing has drifted to him, from the wreck of his fortunes, but a certain annual sum that comes he knows not how, with an earnest entreaty that he will not seek to discover, and with the assurance that it is a debt, and an act of reparation. He has consulted with his old clerk about this, who is clear it may be honourably accepted, and has no doubt it arises out of some forgotten transaction in the times of the old House.

That hazel-eyed bachelor, a bachelor no more, is married now, and to the sister of the grey-haired junior. He visits his old chief sometimes, but seldom. There is a reason in the grey-haired junior's history, and yet a stronger reason in his name, why he should keep retired from his old employer; and, as he lives with his

sister and her husband, they participate in that retirement. Walter sees them sometimes—Florence too—and the pleasant house resounds with profound duets arranged for the pianoforte and violoncello, and with the labours of Harmonious Blacksmiths.

And how goes the Wooden Midshipman in these changed days? Why, here he still is, right leg foremost, hard at work upon the hackney coaches, and more on the alert than ever, being newly painted, from his cocked-hat to his buckled shoes; and up above him, in golden characters, these names shine resplendent, GILLS AND CUTTLE.

Not another stroke of business does the Midshipman achieve beyond his usual easy trade. But they do say, in a circuit of some half-mile round the blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, that some of Mr. Gills's old investments are coming out wonderfully well; and that instead of being behind the time in those respects, as he supposed, he was, in truth, a little before it, and had to wait the fullness of the time and the design. The whisper is that Mr. Gills's money has begun to turn itself, and that it is turning itself over and over pretty briskly. Certain it is that, standing at his shop-door, in his coffee-coloured suit, with his chronometer in his pocket, and his spectacles on his forehead, he don't appear to break his heart at customers not coming, but looks very jovial and contented, though full as misty as of yore.

As to his partner, Captain Cuttle, there is a fiction of a business in the captain's mind which is better than any reality. The captain is as satisfied of the Midshipman's importance to the commerce and navigation of the country as he could possibly be, if no ship left the Port of London without the Midshipman's assistance. His delight in his own name over the door is inexhaustible. He crosses the street twenty times a day, to look at it from the other side of the way; and invariably says, on these occasions, "Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, if your mother could ha' knowed as you would ever be a man o' science, the good old creetur would ha' been took aback in-deed!"

But here is Mr. Toots descending on the Midshipman with violent rapidity, and Mr. Toots's face is very red as he bursts into the little parlour.

"Captain Gills," says Mr. Toots, "and Mr. Sols, I am happy to inform you that Mrs. Toots has had an increase to her family."

"And it does her credit!" cries the captain.

"I give you joy, Mr. Toots!" says old Sol.

"Thankee," chuckles Mr. Toots, "I'm very much obliged to you. I knew that you'd be

glad to hear, and so I came down myself. We're positively getting on, you know. There's Florence, and Susan, and now here's another little stranger."

"A female stranger?" inquires the captain.

"Yes, Captain Gills," says Mr. Toots; "and I'm glad of it. The oftener we can repeat that most extraordinary woman, my opinion is, the better!"

"Stand by!" says the captain, turning to the old case-bottle with no throat—for it is evening, and the Midshipman's usual moderate provision of pipes and glasses is on the board. "Here's to her, and may she have ever so many more!"

"Thankee, Captain Gills," says the delighted Mr. Toots. "I echo the sentiment. If you'll allow me, as my so doing cannot be unpleasant to anybody, under the circumstances, I think I'll take a pipe."

Mr. Toots begins to smoke accordingly, and in the openness of his heart is very loquacious.

"Of all the remarkable instances that that delightful woman has given of her excellent sense, Captain Gills and Mr. Sols," says Toots, "I think none is more remarkable than the perfection with which she has understood my devotion to Miss Dombey."

Both his auditors assent.

"Because, you know," says Mr. Toots, "I have never changed my sentiments towards Miss Dombey. They are the same as ever. She is the same bright vision to me, at present, that she was before I made Walters's acquaintance. When Mrs. Toots and myself first began to talk of—in short, of the tender passion, you know, Captain Gills——"

"Ay, ay, my lad," says the captain, "as makes us all slue round—for which you'll overhaul the book——"

"I shall certainly do so, Captain Gills," said Mr. Toots with great earnestness. "When we first began to mention such subjects, I explained that I was what you may call a blighted flower, you know."

The captain approves of this figure greatly; and murmurs that no flower as blows is like the rose.

"But Lord bless me," pursues Mr. Toots, "she was as entirely conscious of the state of my feelings as I was myself. There was nothing I could tell *her*. She was the only person who could have stood between me and the silent tomb, and she did it, in a manner to command my everlasting admiration. She knows that there's nobody in the world I look up to as I do to Miss Dombey. She knows that there's nothing on earth I wouldn't do for Miss Dombey. She knows that I consider her the most beautiful, the most amiable, the most angelic of her

sex. What is her observation upon that? The perfection of sense. 'My dear, you're right. I think so too.'"

"And so do I!" says the captain.

"So do I," says Sol Gills.

"Then," resumes Mr. Toots after some contemplative pulling at his pipe, during which his visage has expressed the most contented reflection, "what an observant woman my wife is! What sagacity she possesses! What remarks she makes! It was only last night, when we were sitting in the enjoyment of connubial bliss—which, upon my word and honour, is a feeble term to express my feelings in the society of my wife—that she said how remarkable it was to consider the present position of our friend Walters. 'Here,' observes my wife, 'he is, released from sea-going, after that first long voyage with his young bride'—as you know he was, Mr. Sols."

"Quite true," says the old instrument-maker, rubbing his hands.

"Here he is," says my wife, 'released from that immediately; appointed by the same establishment to a post of great trust and confidence at home; showing himself again worthy; mounting up the ladder with the greatest expedition; beloved by everybody; assisted by his uncle at the very best possible time of his fortunes'—which I think is the case, Mr. Sols. My wife is always correct."

"Why, yes, yes—some of our lost ships, freighted with gold, have come home, truly," returns old Sol, laughing. "Small craft, Mr. Toots, but serviceable to my boy!"

"Exactly so!" says Mr. Toots. "You'll never find my wife wrong. 'Here he is,' says that most remarkable woman, 'so situated,—and what follows? What follows?' observed Mrs. Toots. Now pray remark, Captain Gills, and Mr. Sols, the depth of my wife's penetration. 'Why, that, under the very eye of Mr. Dombey, there is a foundation going on, upon which a—an Edifice'—that was Mrs. Toots's word," says Mr. Toots exultingly—"is gradually rising, perhaps to equal, perhaps excel, that of which he was once the head, and the small beginnings of which (a common fault, but a bad one, Mrs. Toots said) escaped his memory. Thus," said my wife, 'from his daughter, after all, another Dombey and Son will ascend'—no 'rise;' that was Mrs. Toots's word—'triumphant!'"

Mr. Toots, with the assistance of his pipe—which he is extremely glad to devote to oratorical purposes, as its proper use affects him with a very uncomfortable sensation—does such grand justice to this prophetic sentence of his wife's,

that the captain, throwing away his glazed hat in a state of the greatest excitement, cries :

"Sol Gills, you man of science, and my ould pardner, what did I-tell Wal'r to overhaul on that there night when he first took to business? Was it this here quotation, 'Turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you

are old you will never depart from it?' Was it them words, Sol Gills?"

"It certainly was, Ned," replied the old instrument-maker. "I remember well."

"Then I tell you what," says the captain, leaning back in his chair, and composing his chest for a prodigious roar. "I'll give you



CAPTAIN CUTTLE GIVES THEM THE LOVELY PEG.

Lovely Peg right through; and stand by, both on you, for the chorus!"

Buried wine grows older, as the old madeira did in its time; and dust and cobwebs thicken on the bottles.

Autumn days are shining, and on the beach there are often a young lady and a white-haired gentleman. With them, or near them, are two children: boy and girl. And an old dog is generally in their company.

The white-haired gentleman walks with the

Little boy, talks with him, helps him in his play, attends upon him, watches him, as if he were the object of his life. If he is thoughtful, the white-haired gentleman is thoughtful too; and sometimes when the child is sitting by his side, and looks up in his face, asking him questions, he takes the tiny hand in his, and holding it, forgets to answer. Then the child says, "What, grandpapa, am I so like my poor little uncle again?"

"Yes, Paul. But he was weak, and you are very strong."

"Oh yes, I am very strong!"

"And he lay on a little bed beside the sea, and you can run about."

And so they range away again busily, for the white-haired gentleman likes best to see the child free and stirring; and, as they go about together, the story of the bond between them goes about, and follows them.

But no one, except Florence, knows the measure of the white-haired gentleman's affection for the girl. That story never goes about. The child herself almost wonders at a certain secrecy he keeps in it. He hoards her in his heart. He cannot bear to see a cloud upon her face. He cannot bear to see her sit apart. He fancies that she feels a slight when there is none. He steals away to look at her in her sleep. It pleases him to have her come and wake him in the morning. He is fondest of her, and most loving to her, when there is no creature by. The child says then, sometimes:

"Dear grandpapa, why do you cry when you kiss me?"

He only answers, "Little Florence! Little Florence!" and smooths away the curls that shade her earnest eyes.



THE
UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER

BY
CHARLES DICKENS



WITH TWENTY-SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. G. DALZIEL.

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THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER.

I.

HIS GENERAL LINE OF BUSINESS.

ALLOW me to introduce myself—first negatively.

No landlord is my friend and brother, no chambermaid loves me, no waiter worships me, no boots admire and envies me. No round of beef or tongue or ham is expressly cooked for me, no pigeon-pie is especially made for me, no hotel advertisement is personally addressed to me, no hotel-room tapestried with great-coats and railway wrappers is

THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER, I.

set apart for me, no house of public entertainment in the United Kingdom greatly cares for my opinion of its brandy or sherry. When I go upon my journeys, I am not usually rated at a low figure in the bill; when I come home from my journeys, I never get any commission. I know nothing about prices, and should have no idea, if I were put to it, how to wheedle a man into ordering something he doesn't want. As a town traveller, I am never to be seen driving a vehicle externally like a young and volatile pianoforte van, and internally like an oven in which a number of flat boxes are baking in layers. As a country traveller, I am rarely to be found in a gig, and am never to be encountered

by a pleasure train, waiting on the platform of a branch station, quite a Druid in the midst of a light Stonehenge of samples.

And yet—proceeding now to introduce myself positively—I am both a town traveller and a country traveller, and am always on the road. Figuratively speaking, I travel for the great house of Human Interest Brothers, and have rather a large connection in the fancy-goods way. Literally speaking, I am always wandering here and there from my rooms in Covent Garden, London—now about the City streets: now about the country by-roads—seeing many little things, and some great things, which, because they interest me, I think may interest others.

These are my brief credentials as the Uncommercial Traveller.

II.

THE SHIPWRECK.

NEVER had I seen a year going out, or going on, under quieter circumstances. Eighteen hundred and fifty nine had but another day to live, and truly its end was Peace on that sea-shore that morning.

So settled and orderly was everything seaward, in the bright light of the sun and under the transparent shadows of the clouds, that it was hard to imagine the bay otherwise, for years past or to come, than it was that very day. The Tug-steamer lying a little off the shore, the Lighter lying still nearer to the shore, the boat alongside the Lighter, the regularly-turning windlass aboard the Lighter, the methodical figures at work, all slowly and regularly heaving up and down with the breathing of the sea, all seemed as much a part of the nature of the place as the tide itself. The tide was on the flow, and had been for some two hours and a half; there was a slight obstruction in the sea within a few yards of my feet: as if the stump of a tree, with earth enough about it to keep it from lying horizontally on the water, had slipped a little from the land; and as I stood upon the beach, and observed it dimpling the light swell that was coming in, I cast a stone over it.

So orderly, so quiet, so regular—the rising and falling of the Tug-steamer, the Lighter, and the boat—the turning of the windlass—the coming in of the tide—that I myself seemed, to my own thinking, anything but new to the

spot. Yet, I had never seen it in my life a minute before, and had traversed two hundred miles to get at it. That very morning I had come bowling down, and struggling up, hill-country roads; looking back at snowy summits; meeting courteous peasants, well to do, driving fat pigs and cattle to market; noting the neat and thrifty dwellings, with their unusual quantity of clean white linen drying on the bushes; having windy weather suggested by every cotter's little rick, with its thatch straw-ridged and extra straw-ridged into overhanging compartments like the back of a rhinoceros. Had I not given a lift of fourteen miles to the Coast-guardsman (kit and all), who was coming to his spell of duty there, and had we not just now parted company? So it was; but the journey seemed to glide down into the placid sea, with other chafe and trouble, and for the moment nothing was so calmly and monotonously real under the sun-light as the gentle rising and falling of the water with its freight, the regular turning of the windlass aboard the Lighter, and the slight obstruction so very near my feet.

Oh, reader, haply turning this page by the fireside at Home, and hearing the night wind rumble in the chimney, that slight obstruction was the uppermost fragment of the Wreck of the Royal Charter, Australian trader and passenger ship, Homeward bound, that struck here on the terrible morning of the twenty-sixth of this October, broke into three parts, went down with her treasure of at least five hundred human lives, and has never stirred since!

From which point, or from which, she drove ashore, stern foremost; on which side, or on which, she passed the little Island in the bay, for ages henceforth to be aground certain yards outside her; these are rendered bootless questions by the darkness of that night and the darkness of death. Here she went down.

Even as I stood on the beach with the words "Here she went down!" in my ears, a diver, in his grotesque dress, dipped heavily over the side of the boat alongside the Lighter, and dropped to the bottom. On the shore, by the water's edge, was a rough tent, made of fragments of wreck, where other divers and workmen sheltered themselves, and where they had kept Christmas day with rum and roast beef, to the destruction of their frail chimney. Cast up among the stones and boulders of the beach were great spars of the lost vessel, and masses of iron twisted by the fury of the sea into the strangest forms. The timber was already bleached, and iron rusted; and even these objects did no violence to the prevailing air the whole scene

wore, of having been exactly the same for years and years.

Yet, only two short months had gone since a man, living on the nearest hill-top overlooking the sea, being blown out of bed at about day-break by the wind that had begun to strip his roof off, and getting upon a ladder with his nearest neighbour to construct some temporary device for keeping his house over his head, saw from the ladder's elevation, as he looked down by chance towards the shore, some dark troubled object close in with the land. And he and the other, descending to the beach, and finding the sea mercilessly beating over a great broken ship, had clambered up the stony ways, like staircases without stairs, on which the wild village hangs in little clusters, as fruit hangs on boughs, and had given the alarm. And so, over the hill-slopes, and past the water-fall, and down the gullies where the land drains off into the ocean, the scattered quarrymen and fishermen inhabiting that part of Wales had come running to the dismal sight—their clergyman among them. And as they stood in the leaden morning stricken with pity, leaning hard against the wind, their breath and vision often failing as the sleet and spray rushed at them from the ever forming and dissolving mountains of sea, and as the wool which was a part of the vessel's cargo blew in with the salt foam, and remained upon the land when the foam melted, they saw the ship's life-boat put off from one of the heaps of wreck; and first there were three men in her, and in a moment she capsized, and there were but two; and again, she was struck by a vast mass of water, and there was but one; and again, she was thrown bottom upward, and that one, with his arm struck through the broken planks and waving as if for the help that could never reach him, went down into the deep.

It was the clergyman himself from whom I heard this, while I stood on the shore, looking in his kind wholesome face as it turned to the spot where the boat had been. The divers were down then, and busy. They were "lifting" to-day the gold found yesterday—some five-and-twenty thousand pounds. Of three hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of gold, three hundred thousand pounds' worth, in round numbers, was at that time recovered. The great bulk of the remainder was surely and steadily coming up. Some loss of sovereigns there would be, of course; indeed, at first, sovereigns had drifted in with the sand, and been scattered far and wide over the beach, like sea shells; but most other golden treasure would be found. As it was brought up, it went aboard

the Tug-steamer, where good account was taken of it. So tremendous had, the force of the sea been when it broke the ship, that it had beaten one great ingot of gold deep into a strong and heavy piece of her solid iron-work: in which, also, several loose sovereigns, that the ingot had swept in before it, had been found, as firmly embedded as though the iron had been liquid when they were forced there. It had been remarked of such bodies come ashore, too, as had been seen by scientific men, that they had been stunned to death, and not suffocated. Observation, both of the internal change that had been wrought in them, and of their external expression, showed death to have been thus merciful and easy. The report was brought, while I was holding such discourse on the beach, that no more bodies had come ashore since last night. It began to be very doubtful whether many more would be thrown up until the north-east winds of the early spring set in. Moreover, a great number of the passengers, and particularly the second-class women passengers, were known to have been in the middle of the ship when she parted, and thus the collapsing wreck would have fallen upon them after yawning open, and would keep them down. A diver made known, even then, that he had come upon the body of a man, and had sought to release it from a great superincumbent weight; but that, finding he could not do so without mutilating the remains, he had left it where it was.

It was the kind and wholesome face I have made mention of, as being then beside me, that I had proposed to myself to see when I left home for Wales. I had heard of that clergyman, as having buried many scores of the shipwrecked people; of his having opened his house and heart to their agonised friends; of his having used a most sweet and patient diligence for weeks and weeks in the performance of the forlornest offices that Man can render to his kind; of his having most tenderly and thoroughly devoted himself to the dead, and to those who were sorrowing for the dead. I had said to myself, "In the Christmas season of the year, I should like to see that man!" And he had swung the gate of his little garden in coming out to meet me, not half an hour ago.

So cheerful of spirit and guiltless of affection, as true practical Christianity ever is! I read more of the New Testament in the fresh frank face going up the village beside me, in five minutes, than I have read in anathematizing discourses (albeit put to press with enormous flourishing of trumpets) in all my life. I heard more of the Sacred Book in the cordial voice

that had nothing to say about its owner, than in all the would-be celestial pairs of bellows that have ever blown conceit at me.

We climbed towards the little church at a cheery pace, among the loose stones, the deep mud, the wet coarse grass, the outlying water, and other obstructions from which frost and snow had lately thawed. It was a mistake (my friend was glad to tell me on the way) to suppose that the peasantry had shown any superstitious avoidance of the drowned; on the whole, they had done very well, and had assisted readily. Ten shillings had been paid for the bringing of each body up to the church, but the way was steep, and a horse and cart (in which it was wrapped in a sheet) were necessary, and three or four men, and, all things considered, it was not a great price. The people were none the richer for the wreck, for it was the season of the herring shoal—and who could cast nets for fish, and find dead men and women in the draught?

He had the church keys in his hand, and opened the churchyard gate, and opened the church-door; and we went in.

It is a little church of great antiquity; there is reason to believe that some church has occupied the spot these thousand years or more. The pulpit was gone, and other things usually belonging to the church were gone, owing to its living congregation having deserted it for the neighbouring schoolroom, and yielded it up to the dead. The very Commandments had been shouldered out of their places, in the bringing in of the dead; the black wooden tables on which they were painted were askew; and on the stone pavement below them, and on the stone pavement all over the church, were the marks and stains where the drowned had been laid down. The eye, with little or no aid from the imagination, could yet see how the bodies had been turned, and where the head had been, and where the feet. Some faded traces of the wreck of the Australian ship may be discernible on the stone pavement of this little church, hundreds of years hence, when the digging for gold in Australia shall have long and long ceased out of the land.

Forty-four shipwrecked men and women lay here at one time, awaiting burial. Here with weeping and wailing in every room of his house, my companion worked alone for hours, solemnly surrounded by eyes that could not see him, and by lips that could not speak to him, patiently examining the tattered clothing, cutting off buttons, hair, marks from linen, anything that might lead to subsequent identification, studying

faces, looking for a scar, a bent finger, a crooked toe, comparing letters sent to him with the ruin about him. "My dearest brother had bright grey eyes and a pleasant smile," one sister wrote. Oh, poor sister! well for you to be far from here, and keep that as your last remembrance of him!

The ladies of the clergyman's family, his wife and two sisters-in-law, came in among the bodies often. It grew to be the business of their lives to do so. Any new arrival of a bereaved woman would stimulate their pity to compare the description brought, with the dead realities. Sometimes they would go back able to say, "I have found him," or "I think she lies there." Perhaps the mourner, unable to bear the sight of all that lay in the church, would be led in blindfold. Conducted to the spot with many compassionate words, and encouraged to look, she would say, with a piercing cry, "This is my boy!" and drop insensible on the insensible figure.

He soon observed that, in some cases of women, the identification of persons, though complete, was quite at variance with the marks upon the linen; this led him to notice that even the marks upon the linen were sometimes inconsistent with one another; and thus he came to understand that they had dressed in great haste and agitation, and that their clothes had become mixed together. The identification of men by their dress was rendered extremely difficult, in consequence of a large proportion of them being dressed alike—in clothes of one kind, that is to say, supplied by slop-sellers and outfitters, and not made by single garments, but by hundreds. Many of the men were bringing over parrots, and had receipts upon them for the price of the birds; others had bills of exchange in their pockets, or in belts. Some of these documents, carefully unwrinkled and dried, were little less fresh in appearance that day than the present page will be, under ordinary circumstances, after having been opened three or four times.

In that lonely place it had not been easy to obtain even such common commodities in towns as ordinary disinfectants. Pitch had been burnt in the church, as the readiest thing at hand, and the frying-pan in which it had bubbled over a brazier of coals was still there, with its ashes. Hard by the Communion Table were some boots that had been taken off the drowned and preserved—a gold-digger's boot, cut down the leg for its removal—a trodden-down man's ankle-boot with a buff cloth top—and others—soaked and sandy, weedy and salt.

From the church we passed out into the

churchyard. Here there lay, at that time, one hundred and forty-five bodies that had come ashore from the wreck. He had buried them, when not identified, in graves containing four each. He had numbered each body in a register describing it, and had placed a corresponding number on each coffin, and over each grave. Identified bodies he had buried singly, in private graves, in another part of the churchyard. Several bodies had been exhumed from the graves of four, as relatives had come from a distance and seen his register; and, when recognised, these have been reburied in private graves, so that the mourners might erect separate headstones over the remains. In all such cases he had performed the funeral service a second time, and the ladies of his house had attended. There had been no offence in the poor ashes when they were brought again to the light of day; the beneficent Earth had already absorbed it. The drowned were buried in their clothes. To supply the great sudden demand for coffins, he had got all the neighbouring people handy at tools to work the livelong day, and Sunday likewise. The coffins were neatly formed; I had seen two, waiting for occupants, under the lee of the ruined walls of a stone hut on the beach, within call of the tent where the Christmas Feast was held. Similarly, one of the graves for four was lying open and ready here, in the churchyard. So much of the scanty space was already devoted to the wrecked people, that the villagers had begun to express uneasy doubts whether they themselves could lie in their own ground, with their forefathers and descendants, by-and-by. The churchyard being but a step from the clergyman's dwelling-house, we crossed to the latter; the white surplice was hanging up near the door, ready to be put on at any time, for a funeral service.

The cheerful earnestness of this good Christian minister was as consolatory as the circumstances out of which it shone were sad. I never have seen anything more delightfully genuine than the calm dismissal by himself and his household of all they had undergone, as a simple duty that was quietly done and ended. In speaking of it, they spoke of it with great compassion for the bereaved; but laid no stress upon their own hard share in those weary weeks, except as it had attached many people to them as friends, and elicited many touching expressions of gratitude. This clergyman's brother—himself the clergyman of two adjoining parishes, who had buried thirty-four of the bodies in his own churchyard, and who had done to them all that his brother had done as to the larger number—must

be understood as included in the family. He was there, with his neatly-arranged papers, and made no more account of his trouble than anybody else did. Down to yesterday's post outward, my clergyman alone had written one thousand and seventy-five letters to relatives and friends of the lost people. In the absence of self-assertion, it was only through my now and then delicately putting a question as the occasion arose, that I became informed of these things. It was only when I had remarked again and again, in the church, on the awful nature of the scene of death he had been required so closely to familiarise himself with for the soothing of the living, that he had casually said, without the least abatement of his cheerfulness, "Indeed, it had rendered him unable for a time to eat or drink more than a little coffee now and then, and a piece of bread."

In this noble modesty, in this beautiful simplicity, in this serene avoidance of the least attempt to "improve" an occasion which might be supposed to have sunk of its own weight into my heart, I seemed to have happily come, in a few steps, from the churchyard with its open grave, which was the type of Death, to the Christian dwelling side by side with it, which was the type of Resurrection. I never shall think of the former without the latter. The two will always rest side by side in my memory. If I had lost any one dear to me in this unfortunate ship, if I had made a voyage from Australia to look at the grave in the churchyard, I should go away thankful to God that that house was so close to it, and that its shadow by day and its domestic lights by night fell upon the earth in which its Master had so tenderly laid my dear one's head.

The references that naturally rose out of our conversation to the descriptions sent down of shipwrecked persons, and to the gratitude of relations and friends, made me very anxious to see some of those letters. I was presently seated before a shipwreck of papers, all bordered with black, and from them I made the following few extracts.

A mother writes :

REVEREND SIR,—Amongst the many who perished on your shore was numbered my beloved son. I was only just recovering from a severe illness, and this fearful affliction has caused a relapse, so that I am unable at present to go to identify the remains of the loved and lost. My darling son would have been sixteen on Christmas-day next. He was a most amiable and obedient child, early taught the way of sal-

vation. We fondly hoped that as a British seaman he might be an ornament to his profession, but, "it is well;" I feel assured my dear boy is now with the redeemed. Oh, he did not wish to go this last voyage! On the fifteenth of October I received a letter from him from Melbourne, date August twelfth; he wrote in high spirits, and in conclusion he says: "Pray for a fair breeze, mamma, and I'll not forget to whistle for it! and, God permitting, I shall see you and all my little pets again. Good-bye, dear mother—good-bye, dearest parents. Good-bye, dear brother." Oh, it was indeed an eternal farewell! I do not apologise for thus writing you, for oh! my heart is so very sorrowful.

A husband writes:

MY DEAR KIND SIR,—Will you kindly inform me whether there are any initials upon the ring and guard you have in possession, found, as the Standard says, last Tuesday? Believe me, my dear sir, when I say that I cannot express my deep gratitude in words sufficiently for your kindness to me on that fearful and appalling day. Will you tell me what I can do for you, and will you write me a consoling letter to prevent my mind from going astray?

A widow writes:

Left in such a state as I am, my friends and I thought it best that my dear husband should be buried where he lies, and, much as I should have liked to have had it otherwise, I must submit. I feel, from all I have heard of you, that you will see it done decently and in order. Little does it signify to us, when the soul has departed, where this poor body lies, but we who are left behind would do all we can to show how we loved them. This is denied me, but it is God's hand that afflicts us, and I try to submit. Some day I may be able to visit the spot, and see where he lies, and erect a simple stone to his memory. Oh! it will be long, long before I forget that dreadful night! Is there such a thing in the vicinity, or any shop in Bangor, to which I could send for a small picture of Moelfra or Llanallgo Church, a spot now sacred to me?

Another widow writes:

I have received your letter this morning, and do thank you most kindly for the interest you have taken about my dear husband, as well for the sentiments yours contains, evincing the spirit of a Christian who can sympathise with those who, like myself, are broken down with grief.

May God bless and sustain you, and all in

connection with you, in this trial! Time may roll on, and bear all its sons away, but your name as a disinterested person will stand in history, and, as successive years pass, many a widow will think of your noble conduct, and the tears of gratitude flow down many a cheek, the tribute of a thankful heart, when other things are forgotten for ever.

A father writes:

I am at a loss to find words to sufficiently express my gratitude to you for your kindness to my son Richard, upon the melancholy occasion of his visit to his dear brother's body, and also for your ready attention in pronouncing our beautiful burial service over my poor unfortunate son's remains. God grant that your prayers over him may reach the Mercy-Seat, and that his soul may be received (through Christ's intercession) into heaven!

His dear mother begs me to convey to you her heartfelt thanks.

Those who were received at the clergyman's house write thus after leaving it:

DEAR AND NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN FRIENDS,—I arrived here yesterday morning without accident, and am about to proceed to my home by railway.

I am overpowered when I think of you and your hospitable home. No words could speak language suited to my heart. I refrain. God reward you with the same measure you have meted with!

I enumerate no names, but embrace you all.

MY BELOVED FRIENDS,—This is the first day that I have been able to leave my bedroom since I returned, which will explain the reason of my not writing sooner.

If I could only have had my last melancholy hope realised in recovering the body of my beloved and lamented son, I should have returned home somewhat comforted, and I think I could then have been comparatively resigned.

I fear now there is but little prospect, and I mourn as one without hope.

The only consolation to my distressed mind is in having been so feelingly allowed by you to leave the matter in your hands, by whom I well know that everything will be done that can be, according to arrangements made before I left the scene of the awful catastrophe, both as to the identification of my dear son, and also his interment.

I feel most anxious to hear whether anything

fresh has transpired since I left you: will you add another to the many deep obligations I am under to you by writing to me? And should the body of my dear and unfortunate son be identified, let me hear from you immediately, and I will come again.

Words cannot express the gratitude I feel I owe to you all for your benevolent aid, your kindness, and your sympathy.

MY DEARLY-BELOVED FRIENDS,—I arrived in safety at my house yesterday, and a night's rest has restored and tranquillised me. I must again repeat that language has no words by which I can express my sense of obligation to you. You are enshrined in my heart of hearts.

I have seen him! and can now realise my misfortune more than I have hitherto been able to do. Oh, the bitterness of the cup I drink! But I bow submissive. God *must* have done right. I do not want to feel less, but to acquiesce more simply.

There were some Jewish passengers on board the Royal Charter, and the gratitude of the Jewish people is feelingly expressed in the following letter, bearing date from "the office of the Chief Rabbi:—"

REVEREND SIR,—I cannot refrain from expressing to you my heartfelt thanks on behalf of those of my flock whose relatives have unfortunately been among those who perished at the late wreck of the Royal Charter. You have indeed, like Boaz, "not left off your kindness to the living and the dead."

You have not alone acted kindly towards the living by receiving them hospitably at your house, and energetically assisting them in their mournful duty, but also towards the dead, by exerting yourself to have our co-religionists buried in our ground, and according to our rites. May our heavenly Father reward you for your acts of humanity and true philanthropy!

The "Old Hebrew congregation of Liverpool" thus express themselves through their secretary:

REVEREND SIR,—The wardens of this congregation have learned with great pleasure that, in addition to those indefatigable exertions, at the scene of the late disaster to the Royal Charter, which have received universal recognition, you have very benevolently employed your valuable efforts to assist such members of our faith as have sought the bodies of lost friends to give them burial in our consecrated

grounds, with the observances and rites prescribed by the ordinances of our religion.

The wardens desire me to take the earliest available opportunity to offer to you, on behalf of our community, the expression of their warm acknowledgments and grateful thanks, and their sincere wishes for your continued welfare and prosperity.

A Jewish gentleman writes:

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—I take the opportunity of thanking you right earnestly for the promptness you displayed in answering my note with full particulars concerning my much-lamented brother, and I also herein beg to express my sincere regard for the willingness you displayed, and for the facility you afforded, for getting the remains of my poor brother exhumed. It has been to us a most sorrowful and painful event, but, when we meet with such friends as yourself, it in a measure, somehow or other, abates that mental anguish, and makes the suffering so much easier to be borne. Considering the circumstances connected with my poor brother's fate, it does, indeed, appear a hard one. He had been away, in all, seven years; he returned four years ago to see his family. He was then engaged to a very amiable young lady. He had been very successful abroad, and was now returning to fulfil his sacred vow; he brought all his property with him in gold uninsured. We heard from him when the ship stopped at Queenstown, when he was in the highest of hope, and in a few short hours afterwards all was washed away.

Mournful in the deepest degree, but too sacred for quotation here, were the numerous references to those miniatures of women worn round the necks of rough men (and found there after death), those locks of hair, those scraps of letters, those many many slight memorials of hidden tenderness. One man cast up by the sea bore about him, printed on a perforated lace card, the following singular (and unavailing) charm.

A BLESSING.

May the blessing of God await thee. May the sun of glory shine around thy bed; and may the gates of plenty, honour, and happiness be ever open to thee. May no sorrow distress thy days; may no grief disturb thy nights. May the pillow of peace kiss thy cheek, and the pleasures of imagination attend thy dreams; and when length of years makes thee tired of earthly joys, and the curtain of death gently

closes around thy last sleep of human existence, may the Angel of God attend thy bed, and take care that the expiring lamp of life shall not receive one rude blast to hasten on its extinction.

A sailor had these devices on his right arm. "Our Saviour on the Cross, the forehead of the Crucifix and the vesture stained red; on the lower part of the arm, a man and woman; on one side of the Cross, the appearance of a half moon, with a face; on the other side, the sun; on the top of the Cross, the letters I.H.S.; on the left arm, a man and woman dancing, with an effort to delineate the female's dress, under which, initials." Another seaman "had, on the lower part of the right arm, the device of a sailor and a female; the man holding the Union Jack with a streamer, the folds of which waved over her head, and the end of it was held in her hand. On the upper part of the arm, a device of Our Lord on the Cross, with stars surrounding the head of the Cross, and one large star on the side in Indian ink. On the left arm, a flag, a true lover's knot, a face, and initials." This tattooing was found still plain, below the discoloured outer surface of a mutilated arm, when such surface was carefully scraped away with a knife. It is not improbable that the perpetuation of this marking custom among seamen may be referred back to their desire to be identified, if drowned and flung ashore.

It was some time before I could sever myself from the many interesting papers on the table, and then I broke bread and drank wine with the kind family before I left them. As I brought the Coast-guard down, so I took the Postman back with his leathern wallet, walking-stick, bugle, and terrier dog. Many a heart-broken letter had he brought to the Rectory House within two months; many a benignantly pained answer had he carried back.

As I rode along, I thought of the many people, inhabitants of this mother country, who would make pilgrimages to the little churchyard in the years to come; I thought of the many people in Australia who would have an interest in such a shipwreck, and would find their way here when they visit the Old World; I thought of the writers of all the wreck of letters I had left upon the table; and I resolved to place this little record where it stands. Convocations, Conferences, Diocesan Epistles, and the like, will do a great deal for Religion, I dare say, and Heaven send they may! but I doubt if they will ever do their Master's service half so well, in all the time they last, as the Heavens have seen it done in this bleak spot upon the rugged coast of Wales.

Had I lost the friend of my life in the wreck of the Royal Charter; had I lost my betrothed, the more than friend of my life; had I lost my maiden daughter, had I lost my hopeful boy, had I lost my little child; I would kiss the hands that worked so busily and gently in the church, and say, "None better could have touched the form, though it had lain at home." I could be sure of it, I could be thankful for it: I could be content to leave the grave near the house the good family pass in and out of every day, undisturbed, in the little churchyard where so many are so strangely brought together.

Without the name of the clergyman to whom—I hope, not without carrying comfort to some heart at some time—I have referred, my reference would be as nothing. He is the Reverend Stephen Roose Hughes, of Llanallo, near Moelfra, Anglesey. His brother is the Reverend Hugh Robert Hughes, of Penrhos. Alligwy.

III.

WAPPING WORKHOUSE.

MY day's no-business beckoning me to the East-end of London, I had turned my face to that point of the metropolitan compass on leaving Covent Garden, and had got past the India House, thinking in my idle manner of Tippoo Sahib and Charles Lamb, and had got past my little Wooden Midshipman, after affectionately patting him on one leg of his knee-shorts for old acquaintance' sake, and had got past Aldgate Pump, and had got past the Saracen's Head (with an ignominious rash of posting-bills disfiguring his swarthy countenance), and had strolled up the empty yard of his ancient neighbour the Black or Blue Boar, or Bull, who departed this life I don't know when, and whose coaches are all gone I don't know where; and I had come out again into the age of railways, and I had got past Whitechapel Church, and was—rather inappropriately for an Uncommercial Traveller—in the Commercial Road. Pleasantly wallowing in the abundant mud of that thoroughfare, and greatly enjoying the huge piles of building belonging to the sugar refiners, the little masts and vanes in small back-gardens in back-streets, the neighbouring canals and docks, the India vans lumbering along their stone tramway, and the pawnbrokers' shops where hard-up Mates had pawned so many sextants and quadrants, that I should have

bought a few cheap if I had the least notion how to use them, I at last began to file off to the right, towards Wapping.

Not that I intended to take boat at Wapping Old Stairs, or that I was going to look at the locality, because I believe (for I don't) in the constancy of the young woman who told her seagoing lover, to such a beautiful old tune, that she had ever continued the same since she gave him the 'baccor-box marked with his name; I am afraid he usually got the worst of those transactions, and was frightfully taken in. No, I was going to Wapping, because an Eastern police magistrate had said, through the morning papers, that there was no classification at the Wapping Workhouse for women, and that it was a disgrace and a shame, and divers other hard names, and because I wished to see how the fact really stood. For, that Eastern police magistrates are not always the wisest men of the East may be inferred from their course of procedure respecting the fancy-dressing and pantomime-posturing at St. George's in that quarter: which is usually to discuss the matter at issue, in a state of mind betokening the weakest perplexity, with all parties, concerned and unconcerned, and, for a final expedient, to consult the complainant as to what he thinks ought to be done with the defendant, and take the defendant's opinion as to what he would recommend to be done with himself.

Long before I reached Wapping, I gave myself up as having lost my way, and, abandoning myself to the narrow streets in a Turkish frame of mind, relied on predestination to bring me somehow or other to the place I wanted, if I were ever to get there. When I had ceased for an hour or so to take any trouble about the matter, I found myself on a swing-bridge, looking down at some dark locks in some dirty water. Over against me stood a creature remotely in the likeness of a young man, with a puffed sallow face, and a figure all dirty and shiny and slimy, who may have been the youngest son of his filthy old father, Thames, or the drowned man about whom there was a placard on the granite post like a large thimble, that stood between us.

I asked this apparition what it called the place? Unto which it replied, with a ghastly grin and a sound like gurgling water in its throat:

"Mr. Baker's trap."

As it is a point of great sensitiveness with me on such occasions to be equal to the intellectual pressure of the conversation, I deeply considered the meaning of this speech, while I eyed the

apparition—then engaged in hugging and sucking a horizontal iron bar at the top of the locks. Inspiration suggested to me that Mr. Baker was the acting coroner of that neighbourhood.

"A common place for suicide," said I, looking down at the locks.

"Sue?" returned the ghost with a stare. "Yes! And Poll. Likewise Emily. And Nancy. And Jane;" he sucked the iron between each name; "and all the bileing. Ketches off their bonnets or shorls, takes a run, and headers down here, they doos. Always a headerin' down here, they is. Like one o'clock."

"And at about that hour of the morning, I suppose?"

"Ah!" said the apparition. "*They* ain't partickler. Two 'ull do for *them*. Three. All times o' night. On'y mind you!" Here the apparition rested his profile on the bar, and gurgled in a sarcastic manner. "There must be somebody comin'. They don't go a headerin' down here wen there ain't no Bobby nor General Cove fur to hear the splash."

According to my interpretation of these words, I was myself a General Cove, or member of the miscellaneous public. In which modest character I remarked:

"They are often taken out are they, and restored?"

"I dunno about restored," said the apparition, who, for some occult reason, very much objected to that word; "they're carried into the werkiss, and put into a 'ot bath, and brought round. But I dunno about restored," said the apparition; "blow *that*!"—and vanished.

As it had shown a desire to become offensive, I was not sorry to find myself alone, especially as the "werkiss" it had indicated with a twist of its matted head was close at hand. So I left Mr. Baker's terrible trap (baited with a scum that was like the soapy rinsing of sooty chimneys), and made bold to ring at the workhouse gate, where I was wholly unexpected and quite unknown.

A very bright and nimble little matron, with a bunch of keys in her hand, responded to my request to see the House. I began to doubt whether the police magistrate was quite right in his facts, when I noticed her quick active little figure and her intelligent eyes.

The traveller (the matron intimated) should see the worst first. He was welcome to see everything. Such as it was, there it all was.

This was the only preparation for our entering "the Foul wards." They were in an old building—squeezed away in a corner of a paved yard, quite detached from the more modern and spa-

cious main body of the workhouse. They were in a building most monstrously behind the time—a mere series of garrets or lofts, with every inconvenient and objectionable circumstance in their construction, and only accessible by steep and narrow staircases, infamously ill adapted for the passage up-stairs of the sick, or down-stairs of the dead.

Abed in these miserable rooms, here on bedsteads, there (for a change, as I understood it) on the floor, were women in every stage of distress and disease. None but those who have attentively observed such scenes can conceive the extraordinary variety of expression still latent under the general monotony and uniformity of colour, attitude, and condition. The form a little coiled up and turned away, as though it had turned its back on this world for ever; the uninterested face, at once lead-coloured and yellow, looking passively upward from the pillow; the haggard mouth a little dropped, the hand outside the coverlet, so dull and indifferent, so light, and yet so heavy; these were on every pallet: but when I stopped beside a bed, and said ever so slight a word to the figure lying there, the ghost of the old character came into the face, and made the Foul ward as various as the fair world. No one appeared to care to live, but no one complained; all who could speak said that as much was done for them as could be done there, that the attendance was kind and patient, that their suffering was very heavy, but they had nothing to ask for. The wretched rooms were as clean and sweet as it is possible for such rooms to be; they would become a pest-house in a single week, if they were ill kept.

I accompanied the brisk matron up another barbarous staircase, into a better kind of loft, devoted to the idiotic and imbecile. There was at least Light in it, whereas the windows in the former wards had been like sides of school-boys' bird-cages. There was a strong grating over the fire here, and holding a kind of state on either side of the hearth, separated by the breadth of this grating, were two old ladies in a condition of feeble dignity; which was surely the very last and lowest reduction of self-complacency to be found in this wonderful humanity of ours. They were evidently jealous of each other, and passed their whole time (as some people do whose fires are not grated) in mentally disparaging each other, and contemptuously watching their neighbours. One of these parodies on provincial gentlewomen was extremely talkative, and expressed a strong desire to attend the service on Sundays, from which she represented herself to have derived the greatest interest and consola-

tion when allowed that privilege. She gossiped so well, and looked altogether so cheery and harmless, that I began to think this a case for the Eastern magistrate, until I found that, on the last occasion of her attending chapel, she had secreted a small stick, and had caused some confusion in the responses by suddenly producing it and belabouring the congregation.

So, these two old ladies, separated by the breadth of the grating—otherwise they would fly at one another's caps—sat all day long, suspecting one another, and contemplating a world of fits. For everybody else in the room had fits, except the wards-woman; an elderly, able-bodied pauperess, with a large upper lip, and an air of repressing and saving her strength, as she stood with her hands folded before her, and her eyes slowly rolling, biding her time for catching or holding somebody. This civil personage (in whom I regretted to identify a reduced member of my honourable friend Mrs. Camp's family) said, "They has 'em contiual, sir. They drops without no more notice than if they was coach horses dropped from the moon, sir. And, when one drops, another drops, and sometimes there'll be as many as four or five on 'em at once, dear me, a rolling and a tearin', I less you! This young woman, now, has 'em dreadful bad."

She turned up this young woman's face with her hand as she said it. This young woman was seated on the floor, pondering in the foreground of the afflicted. There was nothing repellent either in her face or head. Many, apparently worse, varieties of epilepsy and hysteria were about her, but she was said to be the worst here. When I had spoken to her a little, she still sat with her face turned up, pondering, and a gleam of the mid-day sun shone in upon her.

—Whether this young woman, and the rest of these so sorely troubled, as they sit or lie pondering in their confused dull way, ever get mental glimpses, among the motes in the sun-light, of healthy people and healthy things? Whether this young woman, brooding like this in the summer season, ever thinks that somewhere there are trees and flowers, even mountains and the great sea? Whether, not to go so far, this young woman ever has any dim revelation of that young woman—that young woman who is not here, and never will come here; who is courted and caressed, and loved, and has a husband, and bears children, and lives in a home, and who never knows what it is to have this lashing and tearing coming upon her? And whether this young woman, God help her, gives

herself up then, and drops like a coach horse from the moon?

I hardly knew whether the voices of infant children, penetrating into so hopeless a place, made a sound that was pleasant or painful to me. It was something to be reminded that the weary world was not all aweary, and was ever renewing itself; but, this young woman was a child not long ago, and a child not long hence might be such as she. Howbeit, the active step and eye of the vigilant matron conducted me past the two provincial gentlewomen (whose dignity was ruffled by the children), and into the adjacent nursery.

There were many babies here, and more than one handsome young mother. There were ugly young mothers also, and sullen young mothers, and callous young mothers. But, the babies had not appropriated to themselves any bad expression yet, and might have been, for anything that appeared to the contrary, in their soft faces, Princes Imperial and Princesses Royal. I had the pleasure of giving a poetical commission to the baker's man to make a cake with all dispatch, and toss it into the oven for one red-headed young pauper and myself, and felt much the better for it. Without that refreshment I doubt if I should have been in a condition for "the Refractories," towards whom my quick little matron—for whose adaptation to her office I had by this time conceived a genuine respect—drew me next, and marshalled me the way that I was going.

The Refractories were picking oakum, in a small room giving on a yard. They sat in line on a form, with their backs to a window; before them, a table, and their work. The oldest Refractory was, say, twenty; youngest Refractory, say, sixteen. I have never yet ascertained, in the course of my uncommercial travels, why a Refractory habit should affect the tonsils and uvula; but I have always observed that Refractories of both sexes and every grade, between a Ragged School and the Old Bailey, have one voice, in which the tonsils and uvula gain a diseased ascendancy.

"Five pound, indeed! I hain't a-going fur to pick five pound," said the Chief of the Refractories, keeping time to herself with her head and chin. "More than enough to pick what we picks now, in sich a place as this, and on wot we gets here!"

(This was in acknowledgment of a delicate intimation that the amount of work was likely to be increased. It certainly was not heavy then, for one Refractory had already done her day's task—it was barely two o'clock—and was

sitting behind it, with a head exactly matching it.)

"A pretty 'Ouse this is, matron, ain't it?" said Refractory Two, "where a pleeseman's called in if a gal says a word!"

"And wen you're sent to prison for nothink or less!" said the Chief, juggling at her oakum as if it were the matron's hair. "But any place is better than this; that's one thing, and be thankful!"

A laugh of Refractories, led by Oakum Head with folded arms—who originated nothing, but who was in command of the skirmishers outside the conversation.

"If any place is better than this," said my brisk guide in the calmest manner, "it is a pity you left a good place when you had one."

"Ho no, I didn't, matron!" returned the Chief with another pull at her oakum, and a very expressive look at the enemy's forehead. "Don't say that, matron, cos it's lies!"

Oakum Head brought up the skirmishers again, skirmished, and retired.

"And I warn't a-going," exclaimed Refractory Two, "though I was in one place for as long as four year—I warn't a-going fur to stop in a place that warn't fit for me—there! And where the family weren't 'spectable characters—there! And where I, fort'nately or hunfort'nately, found that the people weren't what they pretended to make theirselves out to be—there! And where it wasn't their faults, by chalks, if I warn't made bad and ruined. Hah!"

During this speech Oakum Head had again made a diversion with the skirmishers, and had again withdrawn.

The Uncommercial Traveller ventured to remark that he supposed Chief Refractory and Number Two to be the two young women who had been taken before the magistrate?

"Yes!" said the Chief, "we har! and the wonder is, that a pleeseman ain't 'ad in now, and we took off agen. You can't open your lips here without a pleeseman."

Number Two laughed (very uvularly), and the skirmishers followed suit.

"I'm sure I'd be thankful," protested the Chief, looking sideways at the Uncommercial, "if I could be got into a place, or got abroad. I'm sick and tired of this precious 'Ouse, I am, with reason."

So would be, and so was, Number Two. So would be, and so was, Oakum Head. So would be, and so were, Skirmishers.

The Uncommercial took the liberty of hinting that he hardly thought it probable that any lady or gentleman, in want of a likely young domestic

of retiring manners, would be tempted into the engagement of either of the two leading Refractories, on her own presentation of herself as per sample.

"It ain't no good being nothink else here," said the Chief.

The Uncommercial thought it might be worth trying.

"Oh no, it ain't!" said the Chief.

"Not a bit of good," said Number Two.

"And I'm sure I'd be very thankful to be got into a place, or got abroad," said the Chief.



"STOOD A CREATURE REMOTELY IN THE LIKENESS OF A YOUNG MAN, WITH A PUFFED SALLOW FACE, AND A FIGURE ALL DIRTY AND SHINY AND SLIMY, WHO MAY HAVE BEEN THE YOUNGEST SON OF HIS FILTHY OLD FATHER, THAMES."

"And so should I," said Number Two.
"Truly thankful, I should."

Oakum Head then rose, and announced as an entirely new idea, the mention of which pro-

found novelty might be naturally expected to startle her unprepared hearers, that she would be very thankful to be got into a place, or got abroad. And, as if she had then said,

"Chorus, ladies!" all the skirmishers struck up to the same purpose. We left them, thereupon, and began a long walk among the women who were simply old and infirm; but whenever, in the course of this same walk, I looked out of any high window that commanded the yard, I saw Oakum Head with all the other Refractories, looking out at their low window for me, and never failing to catch me, the moment I showed my head.

In ten minutes I had ceased to believe in such fables of a golden time as youth, the prime of life, or a hale old age. In ten minutes all the lights of womankind seemed to have been blown out, and nothing in that way to be left this vault to brag of, but the flickering and expiring snuffs.

And what was very curious was, that these dim old women had one company notion which was the fashion of the place. Every old woman who became aware of a visitor, and was not in bed, hobbled over a form into her accustomed seat, and became one of a line of dim old women confronting another line of dim old women across a narrow table. There was no obligation whatever upon them to range themselves in this way; it was their manner of "receiving." As a rule, they made no attempt to talk to one another, or to look at the visitor, or to look at anything, but sat silently working their mouths, like a sort of poor old Cows. In some of these wards it was good to see a few green plants; in others, an isolated Refractory acting as nurse, who did well enough in that capacity when separated from her compeers. Every one of these wards, day-room, night-room, or both combined, was scrupulously clean and fresh. I have seen as many such places as most travellers in my line, and I never saw one such better kept.

Among the bedridden there was great patience, great reliance on the books under the pillow, great faith in God. All cared for sympathy, but none much cared to be encouraged with hope of recovery; on the whole, I should say, it was considered rather a distinction to have a complication of disorders, and to be in a worse way than the rest. From some of the windows the river could be seen, with all its life and movement: the day was bright, but I came upon no one who was looking out.

In one large ward, sitting by the fire in arm-chairs of distinction, like the President and Vice of the good company, were two old women, upwards of ninety years of age. The younger of the two, just turned ninety, was deaf, but not very, and could easily be made to hear. In her

early time she had nursed a child, who was now another old woman, more infirm than herself, inhabiting the very same chamber. She perfectly understood this when the matron told it, and with sundry nods and motions of her forefinger, pointed out the woman in question. The elder of this pair, ninety-three, seated before an illustrated newspaper (but not reading it), was a bright-eyed old soul, really not deaf, wonderfully preserved, and amazingly conversational. She had not long lost her husband, and had been in that place little more than a year. At Boston, in the State of Massachusetts, this poor creature would have been individually addressed, would have been tended in her own room, and would have had her life gently assimilated to a comfortable life out of doors. Would that be much to do in England for a woman who has kept herself out of a workhouse more than ninety rough long years? When Britain first, at Heaven's command, arose, with a great deal of allegorical confusion, from out the azure main, did her guardian angels positively forbid it in the Charter which has been so much besung?

The object of my journey was accomplished when the nimble matron had no more to show me. As I shook hands with her at the gate, I told her that I thought Justice had not used her very well, and that the wise men of the East were not infallible.

Now, I reasoned with myself, as I made my journey home again, concerning those Foul wards. They ought not to exist; no person of common decency and humanity can see them, and doubt it. But what is this Union to do? The necessary alteration would cost several thousands of pounds; it has already to support three workhouses; its inhabitants work hard for their bare lives, and are already rated for the relief of the Poor to the utmost extent of reasonable endurance. One poor parish in this very Union is rated to the amount of FIVE AND SIXPENCE in the pound, at the very same time when the rich parish of St. George's, Hanover Square, is rated at about SEVENPENCE in the pound, Paddington at about FOURPENCE, St. James's, Westminster, at about TENPENCE! It is only through the equalisation of Poor Rates that what is left undone in this wise can be done. Much more is left undone, or is ill done, than I have space to suggest in these notes of a single uncommercial journey; but, the wise men of the East, before they can reasonably hold forth about it, must look to the North and South and West; let them also, any morning before taking the seat of Solomon, look into the shops and dwellings all around the Temple, and first ask.

themselves, "How much more can these poor people—many of whom keep themselves with difficulty enough out of the workhouse—bear?"

I had yet other matter for reflection as I journeyed home, inasmuch as, before I altogether departed from the neighbourhood of Mr. Baker's trap, I had knocked at the gate of the workhouse of St. George's-in-the-East, and had found it to be an establishment highly creditable to those parts, and thoroughly well administered by a most intelligent master. I remarked in it an instance of the collateral harm that obstinate vanity and folly can do. "This was the Hall where those old paupers, male and female, whom I had just seen, met for the Church service, was it?"—"Yes."—"Did they sing the Psalms to any instrument?"—"They would like to very much; they would have an extraordinary interest in doing so."—"And could none be got?"—"Well, a piano could even have been got for nothing, but these unfortunate dissensions——" Ah! better, far better, my Christian friend in the beautiful garment, to have left the singing boys alone, and left the multitude to sing for themselves! You should know better than I, but I think I have read that they did so, once upon a time, and that "when they had sung an hymn," Some one (not in a beautiful garment) went up unto the Mount of Olives.

It made my heart ache to think of this miserable trifling, in the streets of a city where every stone seemed to call to me, as I walked along, "Turn this way, man, and see what waits to be done!" So I decoyed myself into another train of thought to ease my heart. But, I don't know that I did it, for I was so full of paupers, that it was, after all, only a change to a single pauper, who took possession of my remembrance instead of a thousand.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he had said, in a confidential manner, on another occasion, taking me aside; "but I have seen better days."

"I am very sorry to hear it."

"Sir, I have a complaint to make against the master."

"I have no power here, I assure you. And if I had——"

"But allow me, sir, to mention it, as between yourself and a man who has seen better days, sir. The master and myself are both masons, sir, and I make him the sign continually; but, because I am in this unfortunate position, sir, he won't give me the countersign!"

IV.

TWO VIEWS OF A CHEAP THEATRE.

AS I shut the door of my lodging behind me, and came out into the streets at six on a drizzling Saturday evening in the last past month of January, all that neighbourhood of Covent Garden looked very desolate. It is so essentially a neighbourhood which has seen better days, that bad weather affects it sooner than another place which has not come down in the world. In its present reduced condition it bears a thaw almost worse than any place I know. It gets so dreadfully low-spirited when damp breaks forth. Those wonderful houses about Drury-Lane Theatre, which in the palmy days of theatres were prosperous and long-settled places of business, and which now change hands every week, but never change their character of being divided and subdivided on the ground-floor into mouldy dens of shops, where an orange and half-a-dozen nuts, or a pomatum pot, one cake of fancy soap, and a cigar box are offered for sale, and never sold, were most ruefully contemplated that evening by the statue of Shakspeare, with the rain-drops coursing one another down its innocent nose. Those inscrutable pigeon-hole offices, with nothing in them (not so much as an ink-stand) but a model of a theatre before the curtain, where, in the Italian Opera season, tickets at reduced prices are kept on sale by nomadic gentlemen in smeary hats too tall for them, whom one occasionally seems to have seen on race-courses, not wholly unconnected with strips of cloth of various colours and a rolling ball—those Bedouin establishments, deserted by the tribe, and tenantless, except when sheltering in one corner an irregular row of ginger-beer bottles, which would have made one shudder on such a night, but for its being plain that they had nothing in them, shrunk from the shrill cries of the news-boys at their Exchange in the kennel of Catherine Street, like guilty things upon a fearful summons. At the pipe-shop, in Great Russell Street, the Death's-head pipes were like theatrical memento mori, admonishing beholders of the decline of the playhouse as an Institution. I walked up Bow Street, disposed to be angry with the shops there, that were letting out theatrical secrets by exhibiting to work-a-day humanity the stuff of which diadems and robes of kings are made. I noticed that some shops which had once been in the dramatic line, and had struggled out of

it, were not getting on prosperously—like some actors I have known, who took to business, and failed to make it answer. In a word, those streets looked so dull, and, considered as theatrical streets, so broken and bankrupt, that the FOUND DEAD on the black board at the police-station might have announced the decease of the Drama, and the pools of water outside the fire-engine maker's at the corner of Long Acre might have been occasioned by his having brought out the whole of his stock to play upon its last smouldering ashes.

And yet, on such a night in so degenerate a time, the object of my journey was theatrical. And yet within half an hour I was in an immense theatre, capable of holding nearly five thousand people.

What Theatre? Her Majesty's? Far better. Royal Italian Opera? Far better. Infinitely superior to the latter for hearing in; infinitely superior to both for seeing in. To every part of this Theatre, spacious fire-proof ways of ingress and egress. For every part of it, convenient places of refreshment and retiring rooms. Everything to eat and drink carefully supervised as to quality, and sold at an appointed price; respectable female attendants ready for the commonest women in the audience; a general air of consideration, decorum, and supervision, most commendable; an unquestionably humanising influence in all the social arrangements of the place.

Surely a dear Theatre, then? Because there were in London (not very long ago) Theatres with entrance prices up to half-a-guinea a head, whose arrangements were not half so civilised. Surely, therefore, a dear Theatre? Not very dear. A gallery at threepence, another gallery at fourpence, a pit at sixpence, boxes and pit-stalls at a shilling, and a few private boxes at half-a-crown.

My uncommercial curiosity induced me to go into every nook of this great place, and among every class of the audience assembled in it—amounting that evening, as I calculated, to about two thousand and odd hundreds. Magnificently lighted by a firmament of sparkling chandeliers, the building was ventilated to perfection. My sense of smell, without being particularly delicate, has been so offended in some of the commoner places of public resort, that I have often been obliged to leave them when I have made an uncommercial journey expressly to look on. The air of this Theatre was fresh, cool, and wholesome. To help towards this end, very sensible precautions had been used, ingeniously combining the experience of hos-

pitals and railway stations. Asphalt pavements substituted for wooden floors, honest bare walls of glazed brick and tile—even at the back of the boxes—for plaster and paper, no benches stuffed, and no carpeting or baize used; a cool material, with a light glazed surface, being the covering of the seats.

These various contrivances are as well considered in the place in question as if it were a Fever Hospital; the result is, that it is sweet and healthful. It has been constructed, from the ground to the roof, with a careful reference to sight and sound in every corner; the result is, that its form is beautiful, and that the appearance of the audience, as seen from the proscenium—with every face in it commanding the stage, and the whole so admirably raked and turned to that centre, that a hand can scarcely move in the great assemblage without the movement being seen from thence—is highly remarkable in its union of vastness and compactness. The stage itself, and all its appurtenances of machinery, cellarage, height, and breadth, are on a scale more like the Scala at Milan, or the San Carlo at Naples, or the Grand Opera at Paris, than any notion a stranger would be likely to form of the Britannia Theatre at Hoxton, a mile north of St. Luke's Hospital in the Old Street Road, London. The Forty Thieves might be played here, and every thief ride his real horse, and the disguised captain bring in his oil jars on a train of real camels, and nobody be put out of the way. This really extraordinary place is the achievement of one man's enterprise, and was erected on the ruins of an inconvenient old building in less than five months, at a round cost of five-and-twenty thousand pounds. To dismiss this part of my subject, and still to render to the proprietor the credit that is strictly his due, I must add that his sense of the responsibility upon him to make the best of his audience, and to do his best for them, is a highly agreeable sign of these times.

As the spectators at this Theatre, for a reason I will presently show, were the object of my journey, I entered on the play of the night as one of the two thousand and odd hundreds, by looking about me at my neighbours. We were a motley assemblage of people, and we had a good many boys and young men among us; we had also many girls and young women. To represent, however, that we did not include a very great number and a very fair proportion of family groups, would be to make a gross misstatement. Such groups were to be seen in all parts of the house; in the boxes and stalls, particularly, they were composed of persons of very

decent appearance, who had many children with them. Among our dresses there were most kinds of shabby and greasy wear, and much fustian and corduroy that was neither sound nor fragrant. The caps of our young men were mostly of a limp character, and we who wore them, slouched, high-shouldered, into our places with our hands in our pockets, and occasionally twisted our cravats about our necks like eels, and occasionally tied them down our breasts like links of sausages, and occasionally had a screw in our hair over each cheek bone with a slight Thief flavour in it. Besides prowlers and idlers, we were mechanics, dock labourers, costermongers, petty tradesmen, small clerks, milliners, staymakers, shoe-binders, slop-workers, poor workers in a hundred highways and by-ways. Many of us—on the whole, the majority—were not at all clean, and not at all choice in our lives or conversation. But we had all come together in a place where our convenience was well consulted, and where we were well looked after, to enjoy an evening's entertainment in common. We were not going to lose any part of what we had paid for through anybody's caprice, and as a community we had a character to lose. So, we were closely attentive, and kept excellent order; and let the man or boy who did otherwise instantly get out from this place, or we would put him out with the greatest expedition.

We began at half-past six with a pantomime— with a pantomime so long, that, before it was over, I felt as if I had been travelling for six weeks—going to India, say, by the Overland Mail. The Spirit of Liberty was the principal personage in the Introduction, and the Four Quarters of the World came out of the globe, glittering, and discoursed with the Spirit, who sang charmingly. We were delighted to understand that there was no liberty anywhere but among ourselves, and we highly applauded the agreeable fact. In an allegorical way, which did as well as any other way, we and the Spirit of Liberty got into a kingdom of Needles and Pins, and found them at war with a potentate who called in to his aid their old arch enemy Rust, and who would have got the better of them if the Spirit of Liberty had not, in the nick of time, transformed the leaders into Clown, Pantaloon, Harlequin, Columbine, Harlequina, and a whole family of Sprites, consisting of a remarkably stout father and three spineless sons. We all knew what was coming when the Spirit of Liberty addressed the king with a big face, and his Majesty backed to the side-scenes, and began untying himself behind, with his big face all on one side. Our excitement at that crisis

was great, and our delight unbounded. After this era in our existence, we went through all the incidents of a pantomime; it was not by any means a savage pantomime, in the way of burning or boiling people, or throwing them out of window, or cutting them up; was often very droll; was always liberally got up, and cleverly presented. I noticed that the people who kept the shops, and who represented the passengers in the thoroughfares, and so forth, had no conventionality in them, but were unusually like the real thing—from which I infer that you may take that audience in (if you wish to) concerning Knights and Ladies, Fairies, Angels, or such-like, but they are not to be done as to anything in the streets. I noticed, also, that when two young men, dressed in exact imitation of the eel-and-sausage-cravated portion of the audience, were chased by policemen, and, finding themselves in danger of being caught, dropped so suddenly as to oblige the policeman to tumble over them, there was great rejoicing among the caps—as though it were a delicate reference to something they had heard of before.

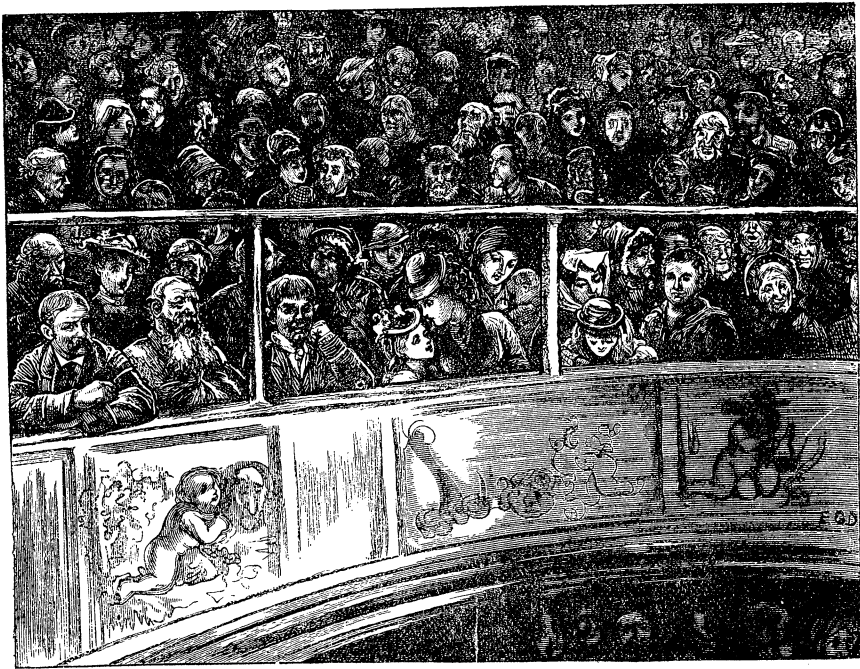
The Pantomime was succeeded by a Melodrama. Throughout the evening I was pleased to observe Virtue quite as triumphant as she usually is out of doors, and, indeed, I thought rather more so. We all agreed (for the time) that honesty was the best policy, and we were as hard as iron upon Vice, and we wouldn't hear of Villainy getting on in the world—no, not on any consideration whatever.

Between the pieces, we almost all of us went out and refreshed. Many of us went the length of drinking beer at the bar of the neighbouring public-house, some of us drank spirits, crowds of us had sandwiches and ginger-beer at the refreshment bars established for us in the Theatre. The sandwich—as substantial as was consistent with portability, and as cheap as possible—we hailed as one of our greatest institutions. It forced its way among us at all stages of the entertainment, and we were always delighted to see it; its adaptability to the varying moods of our nature was surprising; we could never weep so comfortably as when our tears fell on our sandwich; we could never laugh so heartily as when we choked with sandwich; Virtue never looked so beautiful, or Vice so deformed, as when we paused, sandwich in hand, to consider what would come of that resolution of Wickedness in boots, to sever Innocence, in flowered chintz from Honest Industry in striped stockings. When the curtain fell for the night, we still fell back upon sanctity, to help us through the rain and mire, and home to bed.

This, as I have mentioned, was Saturday night. Being Saturday night, I had accomplished but the half of my uncommercial journey; for its object was to compare the play on Saturday evening with the preaching in the same Theatre on Sunday evening.

Therefore, at the same hour of half-past six on the similarly damp and muddy Sunday evening, I returned to this Theatre. I drove up to the entrance (fearful of being late, or I should have come on foot), and found myself in a large crowd

of people, who, I am happy to state, were put into excellent spirits by my arrival. Having nothing to look at but the mud and the closed doors, they looked at me, and highly enjoyed the comic spectacle. My modesty inducing me to draw off, some hundreds of yards, into a dark corner, they at once forgot me, and applied themselves to their former occupation of looking at the mud and looking in at the closed doors: which, being of grated iron-work, allowed the lighted passage within to be seen. They were



A CHEAP THEATRE, SUNDAY NIGHT.

chiefly people of respectable appearance, odd and impulsive as most crowds are, and making a joke of being there as most crowds do.

In the dark corner I might have sat a long while, but that a very obliging passer-by informed me that the Theatre was already full, and that the people whom I saw in the street were all shut out for want of room. After that, I lost no time in worming myself into the building, and creeping to a place in a proscenium box that had been kept for me.

There must have been full four thousand people present. Carefully estimating the pit alone, I could bring it out as holding little less than fourteen hundred. Every part of the house was well filled, and I had not found it easy to make my way along the back of the boxes to where I sat. The chandeliers in the ceiling were lighted; there was no light on the stage; the orchestra was empty. The green curtain was down, and, packed pretty closely on chairs on the small space of stage before it, were some

thirty gentlemen, and two or three ladies. In the centre of these, in a desk or pulpit covered with red baize, was the presiding minister. The kind of rostrum he occupied will be very well understood, if I liken it to a boarded-up fireplace turned towards the audience, with a gentleman in a black surtout standing in the stove, and leaning forward over the mantel-piece.

A portion of Scripture was being read when I went in. It was followed by a discourse, to which the congregation listened with most exemplary attention and uninterrupted silence and decorum. My own attention comprehended both the auditory and the speaker, and shall turn to both in this recalling of the scene, exactly as it did at the time.

"A very difficult thing," I thought when the discourse began, "to speak appropriately to so large an audience, and to speak with tact. Without it, better not to speak at all. Infinitely better to read the New Testament well, and to let *that* speak. In this congregation there is indubitably one pulse; but I doubt if any power short of genius can touch it as one, and make it answer as one."

I could not possibly say to myself, as the discourse proceeded, that the minister was a good speaker. I could not possibly say to myself that he expressed an understanding of the general mind and character of his audience. There was a supposititious working-man introduced into the homily, to make supposititious objections to our Christian religion and be reasoned down, who was not only a very disagreeable person, but remarkably unlike life—very much more unlike it than anything I had seen in the pantomime. The native independence of character this artisan was supposed to possess was represented by a suggestion of a dialect that I certainly never heard in my uncommercial travels, and with a coarse swing of voice and manner anything but agreeable to his feelings, I should conceive, considered in the light of a portrait, and as far away from the fact as a Chinese Tartar. There was a model pauper introduced in like manner, who appeared to me to be the most intolerably arrogant pauper ever relieved, and to show himself in absolute want and dire necessity of a course of Stone Yard. For, how did this pauper testify to his having received the gospel of humility? A gentleman met him in the work-house, and said (which I myself really thought good-natured of him), "Ah, John! I am sorry to see you here. I am sorry to see you so poor." "Poor, sir!" replied that man, drawing himself up; "I am the son of a Prince! *My* father is the King of Kings. *My* father is the

Lord of Lords. *My* father is the Ruler of all the Princes of the Earth!" &c. And this was what all the preacher's fellow-sinners might come to, if they would embrace this blessed book—which I must say it did some violence to my own feelings of reverence to see held out at arm's length at frequent intervals, and soundingly slapped, like a slow lot at a sale. Now, could I help asking myself the question, whether the mechanic before me, who must detect the preacher as being wrong about the visible manner of himself and the like of himself, and about such a noisy lip-server as that pauper, might not, most unhappily for the usefulness of the occasion, doubt that preacher's being right about things not visible to human senses?

Again. Is it necessary or advisable to address such an audience continually as "fellow-sinners"? Is it not enough to be fellow-creatures, born yesterday, suffering and striving to-day, dying to-morrow? By our common humanity, my brothers and sisters, by our common capacities for pain and pleasure, by our common laughter and our common tears, by our common aspiration to reach something better than ourselves, by our common tendency to believe in something good, and to invest whatever we love or whatever we lose with some qualities that are superior to our own failings and weaknesses as we know them in our own poor hearts—by these, Hear me!—Surely, it is enough to be fellow-creatures. Surely, it includes the other designation, and some touching meanings over and above.

Again. There was a personage introduced into the discourse (not an absolute novelty, to the best of my remembrance of my reading), who had been personally known to the preacher, and had been quite a Crichton in all the ways of philosophy, but had been an infidel. Many a time had the preacher talked with him on that subject, and many a time had he failed to convince that intelligent man. But he fell ill, and died, and before he died he recorded his conversion—in words which the preacher had taken down, my fellow-sinners, and would read to you from this piece of paper. I must confess that to me, as one of an uninstructed audience, they did not appear particularly edifying. I thought their tone extremely selfish, and I thought they had a spiritual vanity in them which was of the before-mentioned refractory pauper's family.

All slangs and twangs are objectionable everywhere, but the slang and twang of the conventicle—as bad in its way as that of the House of Commons, and nothing worse can be said of it—should be studiously avoided under such cir-

cumstances as I describe. The avoidance was not complete on this occasion. Nor was it quite agreeable to see the preacher addressing his pet "points" to his backers on the stage, as if appealing to those disciples to show him up, and testify to the multitude that each of those points was a clincher.

But, in respect of the large Christianity of his general tone; of his renunciation of all priestly authority; of his earnest and reiterated assurance to the people that the commonest among them could work out their own salvation if they would, by simply, lovingly, and dutifully following Our Saviour, and that they needed the mediation of no erring man; in these particulars, this gentleman deserved all praise. Nothing could be better than the spirit, or the plain emphatic words of his discourse in these respects. And it was a most significant and encouraging circumstance that whenever he struck that chord, or whenever he described anything which Christ himself had done, the array of faces before him was very much more earnest, and very much more expressive of emotion, than at any other time.

And now I am brought to the fact, that the lowest part of the audience of the previous night *was not there*. There is no doubt about it. There was no such thing in that building, that Sunday evening. I have been told, since, that the lowest part of the audience of the Victoria Theatre has been attracted to its Sunday services. I have been very glad to hear it, but, on this occasion of which I write, the lowest part of the usual audience of the Britannia Theatre decidedly and unquestionably stayed away. When I first took my seat and looked at the house, my surprise at the change in its occupants was as great as my disappointment. To the most respectable class of the previous evening was added a great number of respectable strangers attracted by curiosity, and drafts from the regular congregations of various chapels. It was impossible to fail in identifying the character of these last, and they were very numerous. I came out in a strong, slow tide of them setting from the boxes. Indeed, while the discourse was in progress, the respectable character of the auditory was so manifest in their appearance, that when the minister addressed a supposititious "outcast," one really felt a little impatient of it, as a figure of speech not justified by anything the eye could discover.

The time appointed for the conclusion of the proceedings was eight o'clock. The address having lasted until full that time, and it being the custom to conclude with a hymn, the preacher

intimated in a few sensible words that the clock had struck the hour, and that those who desired to go before the hymn was sung, could go now, without giving offence. No one stirred. The hymn was then sung, in good time and tune and unison, and its effect was very striking. A comprehensive benevolent prayer dismissed the throng, and in seven or eight minutes there was nothing left in the Theatre but a light cloud of dust.

That these Sunday meetings in Theatres are good things, I do not doubt. Nor do I doubt that they will work lower and lower down in the social scale, if those who preside over them will be very careful on two heads: firstly, not to disparage the places in which they speak, or the intelligence of their hearers; secondly, not to set themselves in antagonism to the natural in-born desire of the mass of mankind to recreate themselves and to be amused.

There is a third head, taking precedence of all others, to which my remarks on the discourse I heard have tended. In the New Testament there is the most beautiful and affecting history conceivable by man, and there are the terse models for all prayer and for all preaching. As to the models, imitate them, Sunday preachers—else why are they there, consider? As to the history, tell it. Some people cannot read, some people will not read, many people (this especially holds among the young and ignorant) find it hard to pursue the verse form in which the book is presented to them, and imagine that those breaks imply gaps and want of continuity. Help them over that first stumbling-block by setting forth the history in narrative, with no fear of exhausting it. You will never preach so well, you will never move them so profoundly, you will never send them away with half so much to think of. Which is the better interest: Christ's choice of twelve poor men to help in those merciful wonders among the poor and rejected; or the pious bullying of a whole Union-full of paupers? What is your changed philosopher to wretched me, peeping in at the door out of the mud of the streets and of my life, when you have the widow's son to tell me about, the ruler's daughter, the other figure at the door when the brother of the two sisters was dead, and one of the two ran to the mourner, crying, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee?"—Let the preacher who will thoroughly forget himself, and remember no individuality but one, and no eloquence but one, stand up before four thousand men and women at the Britannia Theatre any Sunday night, recounting that narrative to them as fellow-creatures, and he shall see a sight!

V.

POOR MERCANTILE JACK.

IS the sweet little cherub who sits smiling aloft, and keeps watch on the life of poor Jack, commissioned to take charge of Mercantile Jack, as well as Jack of the national navy? If not, who is? What is the cherub about, and what are we all about, when poor Mercantile Jack is having his brains slowly knocked out by pennyweights, aboard the brig Beelzebub, or the bark Bowie-knife—when he looks his last at that infernal craft, with the first officer's iron boot-heel in his remaining eye, or with his dying body towed overboard in the ship's wake, while the cruel wounds in it do “the multitudinous seas incarnadine?”

Is it unreasonable to entertain a belief that if, aboard the brig Beelzebub or the bark Bowie-knife, the first officer did half the damage to cotton that he does to men, there would presently arise from both sides of the Atlantic so vociferous an invocation of the sweet little cherub who sits calculating aloft, keeping watch on the markets that pay, that such vigilant cherub would, with a winged sword, have that gallant officer's organ of destructiveness out of his head in the space of a flash of lightning?

If it be unreasonable, then am I the most unreasonable of men, for I believe it with all my soul.

This was my thought as I walked the dock-quays at Liverpool, keeping watch on poor Mercantile Jack. Alas for me! I have long outgrown the state of sweet little cherub; but there I was, and there Mercantile Jack was, and very busy he was, and very cold he was; the snow yet lying in the frozen furrows of the land, and the north-east winds snipping off the tops of the little waves in the Mersey, and rolling them into hail-stones to pelt him with. Mercantile Jack was hard at it, in the hard weather: as he mostly is in all weathers, poor Jack! He was girded to ships' masts and funnels of steamers, like a forester to a great oak, scraping and painting; he was lying out on yards, furling sails that tried to beat him off; he was dimly discernible up in a world of giant cobwebs, reefing and splicing; he was faintly audible down in holds, stowing and unshipping cargo; he was winding round and round at capstans melodious, monotonous, and drunk; he was of a diabolical aspect, with coaling for the Antipodes; he was washing decks barefoot, with the breast of his red shirt open to the blast, though it was sharper than

the knife in his leathern girdle; he was looking over bulwarks, all eyes and hair; he was standing by at the shoot of the Cunard steamer, off to-morrow, as the stocks-in-trade of several butchers, poulterers, and fishmongers poured down into the ice-house; he was coming aboard of other vessels with his kit in a tarpaulin bag, attended by plunderers to the very last moment of his shore-going existence. As though his senses, when released from the uproar of the elements, were under obligation to be confused by other turmoil, there was a rattling of wheels, a clattering of hoofs, a clashing of iron, a jolting of cotton and hides and casks and timber, an incessant deafening disturbance on the quays, that was the very madness of sound. And as, in the midst of it, he stood swaying about, with his hair blown all manner of wild ways, rather crazedly taking leave of his plunderers, all the rigging in the docks was shrill in the wind, and every little steamer coming and going across the Mersey was sharp in its blowing off, and every buoy in the river bobbed spitefully up and down, as if there was a general taunting chorus of “Come along, Mercantile Jack! Ill lodged, ill fed, ill used, hocussed, entrapped, anticipated, cleaned out. Come along, Poor Mercantile Jack, and be tempest-tossed till you are drowned!”

The uncommercial transaction which had brought me and Jack together was this:—I had entered the Liverpool police force, that I might have a look at the various unlawful traps which are every night set for Jack. As my term of service in that distinguished corps was short, and as my personal bias in the capacity of one of its members has ceased, no suspicion will attach to my evidence that it is an admirable force. Besides that it is composed, without favour, of the best men that can be picked, it is directed by an unusual intelligence. Its organisation against Fires I take to be much better than the metropolitan system, and in all respects it tempers its remarkable vigilance with a still more remarkable discretion.

Jack had knocked off work in the docks some hours, and I had taken, for purposes of identification, a photograph likeness of a thief, in the portrait-room at our head police-office (on the whole, he seemed rather complimented by the proceeding), and I had been on police parade, and the small hand of the clock was moving on to ten, when I took up my lantern to follow Mr. Superintendent to the traps that were set for Jack. In Mr. Superintendent I saw, as anybody might, a tall, well-looking, well-set-up man of a soldierly bearing, with a cavalry air, a good chest, and a resolute but not by any means un-

gentle, face. He carried in his hand a plain black walking-stick of hard wood: and whenever and wherever, at any after-time of the night, he struck it on the pavement with a ringing sound, it instantly produced a whistle out of the darkness, and a policeman. To this remarkable stick I refer an air of mystery and magic which pervaded the whole of my perquisition among the traps that were set for Jack.

We began by diving into the obscurest streets and lanes of the port. Suddenly pausing in a flow of cheerful discourse before a dead wall, apparently some ten miles long, Mr. Superintendent struck upon the ground, and the wall opened, and shot out, with military salute of hand to temple, two policemen—not in the least surprised themselves, not in the least surprising Mr. Superintendent.

"All right, Sharpeye?"

"All right, sir."

"All right, Trampfoot?"

"All right, sir."

"Is Quickear there?"

"Here am I, sir."

"Come with us."

"Yes, sir."

So, Sharpeye went before, and Mr. Superintendent and I went next, and Trampfoot and Quickear marched as rear-guard. Sharpeye, I soon had occasion to remark, had a skilful and quite professional way of opening doors—touched latches delicately, as if they were keys of musical instruments—opened every door he touched, as if he were perfectly confident that there was stolen property behind it—instantly insinuated himself, to prevent its being shut.

Sharpeye opened several doors of traps that were set for Jack, but Jack did not happen to be in any of them. They were all such miserable places that really, Jack, if I were you, I would give them a wider berth. In every trap somebody was sitting over a fire waiting for Jack. Now, it was a crouching old woman, like the picture of the Norwood Gipsy in the old six-penny dream-books; now, it was a crimp of the male sex, in a checked shirt and without a coat, reading a newspaper; now, it was a man crimp and a woman crimp, who always introduced themselves as united in holy matrimony; now, it was Jack's delight, his (un)lovely Nan; but they were all waiting for Jack, and were all frightfully disappointed to see us.

"Who have you got up-stairs here?" says Sharpeye generally. (In the Move-on tone.)

"Nobody, surr; sure not a blessed sowl!" (Irish feminine reply.)

"What do you mean by nobody? Didn't I
THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER, 3.

hear a woman's step go up-stairs when my hand was on the latch?"

"Ah! sure, thin, you're right, surr, I forgot her. 'Tis on'y Betsy White, surr. Ah! you know Betsy, surr. Come down, Betsy darlin', and say the gintlemin."

Generally, Betsy looks over the banisters (the steep staircase is in the room) with a forcible expression in her protesting face of an intention to compensate herself for the present trial by grinding Jack finer than usual when he does come. Generally, Sharpeye turns to Mr. Superintendent, and says, as if the subject of his remarks were wax-work:

"One of the worst, sir, this house is. This woman has been indicted three times. This man's a regular bad one likewise. His real name is Pegg. Gives himself out as Water-house."

"Never had sitch a name as Pegg near me back, thin, since I was in this house, bee the good Lard!" says the woman.

Generally, the man says nothing at all, but becomes exceedingly round-shouldered, and pretends to read his paper with rapt attention. Generally, Sharpeye directs our observation, with a look, to the prints and pictures that are invariably numerous on the walls. Always Trampfoot and Quickear are taking notice on the door-step. In default of Sharpeye being acquainted with the exact individuality of any gentleman encountered, one of these two is sure to proclaim from the outer air, like a gruff spectre, that Jackson is not Jackson, but knows himself to be Fogle; or that Canlon is Walker's brother, against whom there was not sufficient evidence; or that the man who says he never was at sea since he was a boy, came ashore from a voyage last Thursday, or sails to-morrow morning. "And that is a bad class of man, you see," says Mr. Superintendent when he got out into the dark again, "and very difficult to deal with, who, when he has made this place too hot to hold him, enters himself for a voyage as steward or cook, and is out of knowledge for months, and then turns up again worse than ever."

When we had gone into many such houses, and had come out (always leaving everybody relapsing into waiting for Jack), we started off to a singing-house where Jack was expected to muster strong.

The vocalisation was taking place in a long low room up-stairs; at one end, an orchestra of two performers, and a small platform; across the room, a series of open pews for Jack, with an aisle down the middle; at the other end, a larger pew than the rest, entitled SNUG, and re-

served for mates and similar good company. About the room, some amazing coffee-coloured pictures varnished an inch deep, and some stuffed creatures in cases; dotted among the audience, in Snug and out of Snug, the "Professionals;" among them, the celebrated comic favourite Mr. Banjo Bones, looking very hideous with his blackened face and limp sugar-loaf hat; beside him, sipping rum-and-water, Mrs. Banjo Bones, in her natural colours—a little heightened.

It was a Friday night, and Friday night was considered not a good night for Jack. At any rate, Jack did not show in very great force even here, though the house was one to which he much resorts, and where a good deal of money is taken. There was British Jack, a little maudlin and sleepy, lolling over his empty glass, as if he were trying to read his fortune at the bottom; there was Loafing Jack of the Stars and Stripes, rather an unpromising customer, with his long nose, lank cheek, high cheek bones, and nothing soft about him but his cabbage-leaf hat; there was Spanish Jack, with curls of black hair, rings in his ears, and a knife not far from his hand, if you got into trouble with him; there were Maltese Jack, and Jack of Sweden, and Jack the Finn, looming through the smoke of their pipes, and turning faces that looked as if they were carved out of dark wood, towards the young lady dancing the hornpipe; who found the platform so exceedingly small for it, that I had a nervous expectation of seeing her, in the backward steps, disappear through the window. Still, if all hands had been got together, they would not have more than half filled the room. Observe, however, said Mr. Licensed Victualler, the host, that it was Friday night, and, besides; it was getting on for twelve, and Jack had gone aboard. A sharp and watchful man, Mr. Licensed Victualler, the host, with tight lips, and a complete edition of Cocker's arithmetic in each eye. Attended to his business himself, he said. Always on the spot. When he heard of talent, trusted nobody's account of it, but went off by rail to see it. If true talent, engaged it. Pounds a week for talent—four pound, five pound. Banjo Bones was undoubted talent. Hear this instrument that was going to play—it was real talent! In truth, it was very good; a kind of piano-acordion, played by a young girl of a delicate prettiness of face, figure, and dress, that made the audience look coarser. She sang to the instrument, too; first, a song about village bells, and how they chimed; then a song about how I went to sea; winding up with an imitation of the bagpipes, which Mercantile Jack seemed to

understand much the best. A good girl, said Mr. Licensed Victualler. Kept herself select. Sat in Snug, not listening to the blandishments of Mates. Lived with mother. Father dead. Once a merchant well to do, but over-specified himself. On delicate inquiry as to salary paid for item of talent under consideration, Mr. Victualler's pounds dropped suddenly to shillings—still, it was a very comfortable thing for a young person like that, you know; she only went on six times a night, and was only required to be there from six at night to twelve. What was more conclusive was, Mr. Victualler's assurance that he "never allowed any language, and never suffered any disturbance." Sharpeye confirmed the statement, and the order that prevailed was the best proof of it that could have been cited. So, I came to the conclusion that poor Mercantile Jack might do (as I am afraid he does) much worse than trust himself to Mr. Victualler, and pass his evenings here.

But we had not yet looked, Mr. Superintendent—said Trampfoot, receiving us in the street again with military salute—for Dark Jack. True, Trampfoot. Ring the wonderful stick, rub the wonderful lantern, and cause the spirits of the stick and lantern to convey us to the Darkies.

There was no disappointment in the matter of Dark Jack; *he* was producible. The Genii set us down in the little first floor of a little public-house, and there, in a stifflingly close atmosphere, were Dark Jack, and Dark Jack's delight, his *white* unlovely Nan, sitting against the wall all round the room. More than that: Dark Jack's delight was the least unlovely Nan, both morally and physically, that I saw that night.

As a fiddle and tambourine band were sitting among the company, Quickear suggested, why not strike up? "Ah, la'ads!" said a negro sitting by the door, "gib the jebblem a darnse. Tak' yah pardlers, jebblem, for 'um QUAD-rill."

This was the landlord, in a Greek cap, and a dress half Greek and half English. As master of the ceremonies, he called all the figures, and occasionally addressed himself parenthetically—after this manner. When he was very loud I use capitals.

"Now den! Hoy! ONE. Right and left. (Put a steam on, gib 'um powder.) LA-dies' chail. BAL-loon say. Lemonade! TWO. Ad-warnse and go back (gib 'ell a breakdown, shake it out o' yerselbs, keep a movil). SWING-corners, BAL-loon say, and Lemonade! (Hoy!) THREE. GENT come for'ard with a lady and go back, hoppersite come for'ard and do what yer can. (Acihooy!) BAL-loon say, and leetle

lemonade (Dat hair nigger by 'um fire-place 'hind 'a time, shake it out o' yerselbs, gib 'ell a breakdown.) Now den! Hoy! Four! Lemonade. BAL-loon say, and swing. Four ladies meets in 'um middle, four gents goes round 'um ladies, four gents passes out under 'um ladies' arms, SWING—and Lemonade till 'a moosic can't play no more! (Hoy, Hoy!)"

The male dancers were all blacks, and one was an unusually powerful man of six feet three or four. The sound of their flat feet on the floor was as unlike the sound of white feet as their faces were unlike white faces. They toed and heeled, shuffled, double-shuffled, double-double-shuffled, covered the buckle, and beat the time out, rarely, dancing with a great show of teeth, and with a childish good-humoured enjoyment that was very prepossessing. They generally kept together, these poor fellows, said Mr. Superintendent, because they were at a disadvantage singly, and liable to slights in the neighbouring streets. But, if I were Light Jack, I should be very slow to interfere oppressively with Dark Jack, for, whenever I have had to do with him, I have found him a simple and gentle fellow. Bearing this in mind, I asked his friendly permission to leave him restoration of beer, in wishing him good night, and thus it fell out that the last words I heard him say, as I blundered down the worn stairs, were, "Jeb-blem's elth! Ladies drinks fust!"

The night was now well on into the morning, but for miles and hours we explored a strange world, where nobody ever goes to bed, but everybody is eternally sitting up, waiting for Jack. This exploration was among a labyrinth of dismal courts and blind alleys, called Entries, kept in wonderful order by the police, and in much better order than by the corporation: the want of gas-light in the most dangerous and infamous of these places being quite unworthy of so spirited a town. I need describe but two or three of the houses in which Jack was waited for as specimens of the rest. Many we attained by noisome passages so profoundly dark, that we felt our way with our hands. Not one of the whole number we visited was without its show of prints and ornamental crockery; the quantity of the latter set forth on little shelves and in little cases, in otherwise wretched rooms, indicating that Mercantile Jack must have an extraordinary fondness for crockery, to necessitate so much of that bait in his traps.

Among such garniture, in one front parlour in the dead of the night, four women were sitting by a fire. One of them had a male child in her arms. On the stool among them was a swarthy

youth with a guitar, who had evidently stopped playing when our footsteps were heard.

"Well! how do *you* do?" says Mr. Superintendent, looking about him.

"Pretty well, sir, and hope you gentlemen are going to treat us ladies, now you have come to see us."

"Order there!" says Sharpeye.

"None of that!" says Quickear.

Trampfoot, outside, is heard to confide to himself, "Meggisson's lot, this is. And a bad 'un!"

"Well!" says Mr. Superintendent, laying his hand on the shoulder of the swarthy youth, "and who's this?"

"Antonio, sir."

"And what does *he* do here?"

"Come to give us a bit of music. No harm in that, I suppose?"

"A young foreign sailor?"

"Yes. He's a Spaniard. You're a Spaniard, ain't you, Antonio?"

"Me Spanish."

"And he don't know a word you say, not he; not if you was to talk to him till doomsday." (Triumphantly, as if it redounded to the credit of the house.)

"Will he play something?"

"Oh yes, if you like! Play something, Antonio. *You* ain't ashamed to play something; are you?"

The cracked guitar raises the feeblest ghost of a tune, and three of the women keep time to it with their heads, and the fourth with the child. If Antonio has brought any money in with him, I am afraid he will never take it out, and it even strikes me that his jacket and guitar may be in a bad way. But, the look of the young man and the tinkling of the instrument so change the place in a moment to a leaf out of Don Quixote, that I wonder where his mule is stabled, until he leaves off.

I am bound to acknowledge (as it tends rather to my uncommercial confusion) that I occasioned a difficulty in this establishment, by having taken the child in my arms. For, on my offering to restore it to a ferocious joker not unstimulated by rum, who claimed to be its mother, that unnatural parent put her hands behind her, and declined to accept it; backing into the fire-place, and very shrilly declaring, regardless of remonstrance from her friends, that she knowed it to be 'Law, that whoever took a child from its mother of his own will was bound to stick to it. The uncommercial sense of being in a rather ridiculous position, with the poor little child beginning to be frightened, was relieved by my worthy friend and fellow-constable, Trampfoot;

who, laying hands on the article as if it were a bottle, passed it on to the nearest woman, and bade her "take hold of that." As we came out the Bottle was passed to the ferocious joker, and they all sat down as before, including Antonio and the guitar. It was clear that there was no such thing as a nightcap to this baby's head, and that even he never went to bed, but was always kept up—and would grow up, kept up—waiting for Jack.

Later still in the night we came (by the court "where the man was murdered," and by the other court across the street, into which his body was dragged) to another parlour in another Entry, where several people were sitting round a fire in just the same way. It was a dirty and offensive place, with some ragged clothes drying in it; but there was a high shelf over the entrance-door (to be out of the reach of marauding hands, possibly), with two large white loaves on it, and a great piece of Cheshire cheese.

"Well!" says Mr. Superintendent, with a comprehensive look all round. "How do you do?"

"Not much to boast of, sir." From the curtsying woman at the house. "This is my good man, sir."

"You are not registered as a common Lodging House?"

"No, sir."

Sharpeye (in the move-on tone) puts in the pertinent inquiry, "Then why ain't you?"

"Ain't got no one here, Mr. Sharpeye," rejoin the woman and my good man together, "but our own family."

"How many are you in family?"

The woman takes time to count, under the pretence of coughing, and adds, as one scant of breath, "Seven, sir."

But she has missed one, so Sharpeye, who knows all about it, says:

"Here's a young man here makes eight, who ain't of your family?"

"No, Mr. Sharpeye, he's a weekly lodger."

"What does he do for a living?"

The young man here takes the reply upon himself, and shortly answers, "Ain't got nothing to do."

The young man here is modestly brooding behind a damp apron pendent from a clothes-line. As I glance at him I become—but I don't know why—vaguely reminded of Woolwich, Chatham, Portsmouth, and Dover. When we get out, my respected fellow-constable Sharpeye, addressing Mr. Superintendent, says:

"You noticed that young man, sir, in at Darby's?"

"Yes. What is he?"

"Deserter, sir."

Mr. Sharpeye further intimates that, when we have done with his services, he will step back and take that young man. Which in course of time he does; feeling at perfect ease about finding him, and knowing for a moral certainty that nobody in that region will be gone to bed.

Later still in the night, we came to another parlour up a step or two from the street, which was very cleanly, neatly, even tastefully, kept, and in which, set forth on a draped chest of drawers masking the staircase, was such a profusion of ornamental crockery, that it would have furnished forth a handsome sale-booth at a fair. It backed up a stout old lady—HOGARTH drew her exact likeness more than once—and a boy who was carefully writing a copy in a copy-book.

"Well, ma'am, how do you do?"

Sweetly, she can assure the dear gentleman, sweetly. Charming, charmingly. And overjoyed to see us!

"Why, this is a strange time for this boy to be writing his copy. In the middle of the night!"

"So it is, dear gentlemen, Heaven bless your welcome faces, and send ye prosperous, but he has been to the Play with a young friend for his diversion, and he combines his improvement with entertainment, by doing his school-writing afterwards, God be good to ye!"

The copy admonished human nature to subjugate the fire of every fierce desire. One might have thought it recommended stirring the fire, the old lady so approved it. There she sat, rosilily beaming at the copy-book and the boy, and invoking showers of blessings on our heads, when we left her in the middle of the night, waiting for Jack.

Later still in the night, we came to a nauseous room with an earth floor, into which the refuse scum of an alley trickled. The stench of this habitation was abominable; the seeming poverty of it diseased and dire. Yet here, again, was visitor or lodger—a man sitting before the fire, like the rest of them elsewhere, and apparently not distasteful to the mistress's niece, who was also before the fire. The mistress herself had the misfortune of being in gaol.

Three weird old women of transcendent ghastliness were at needlework at a table in this room. Says Trampfoot to First Witch, "What are you making?" Says she, "Money-bags."

"What are you making?" retorts Trampfoot, a little off his balance.

"Bags to hold your money," says the witch,

shaking her head, and setting her teeth; "you as has got it."

She holds up a common cash-bag, and on the table is a heap of such bags. Witch Two laughs at us. Witch Three scowls at us. Witch sisterhood all, stitch, stitch. First Witch has a red circle round each eye. I fancy it like the beginning of the development of a perverted diabolical halo, and that, when it spreads all round her head, she will die in the odour of devilry.

Trampfoot wishes to be informed what First Witch has got behind the table, down by the side of her, there? Witches Two and Three croak angrily, "Show him the child!"

She drags out a skinny little arm from a brown dust-heap on the ground. Adjured not to disturb the child, she lets it drop again. Thus we find at last that there is one child in the world of Entries who goes to bed—if this be bed.

Mr. Superintendent asks how long are they going to work at those bags?



"BAGS TO HOLD YOUR MONEY," SAYS THE WITCH, SHAKING HER HEAD, AND SETTING HER TEETH; "YOU AS HAS GOT IT."

How long? First Witch repeats. Going to have supper presently. See the cups and saucers, and the plates.

"Late? Ay! But we has to 'arn our supper afore we eats it!" Both the other witches repeat this after First Witch, and take the Uncommercial measurement with their eyes, as for a charmed winding-sheet. Some grim discourse ensues, referring to the mistress of the cave, who will be released from gaol to-morrow. Witches

pronounce Trampfoot "right there," when he deems it a trying distance for the old lady to walk; she shall be fetched by niece in a spring cart.

As I took a parting look at First Witch in turning away, the red marks round her eyes seemed to have already grown larger, and she hungrily and thirstily looked out beyond me into the dark doorway, to see if Jack were there. For, Jack came even here, and the mistress had got into gaol through deluding Jack.

When I at last ended this night of travel, and got to bed, I failed to keep my mind on comfortable thoughts of Seamen's Homes (not overdone with strictness), and improved dock regulations, giving Jack greater benefit of fire and candle aboard ship, through my mind's wandering among the vermin I had seen. Afterwards the same vermin ran all over my sleep. Evermore, when on a breezy day I see Poor Mercantile Jack running into port with a fair wind under all sail, I shall think of the unsleeping host of devourers who never go to bed, and are always in their set traps waiting for him.

VI.

REFRESHMENTS FOR TRAVELLERS.

IN the late high winds I was blown to a great many places—and, indeed, wind or no wind, I generally have extensive transactions on hand in the article of Air—but I have not been blown to any English place lately, and I very seldom have blown to any English place in my life, where I could get anything good to eat and drink in five minutes, or where, if I sought it, I was received with a welcome.

This is a curious thing to consider. But before (stimulated by my own experiences and the representations of many fellow-travellers of every uncommercial and commercial degree) I consider it further, I must utter a passing word of wonder concerning high winds.

I wonder why metropolitan gales always blow so hard at Walworth. I cannot imagine what Walworth has done to bring such windy punishment upon itself, as I never fail to find recorded in the newspapers when the wind has blown at all hard. Brixton seems to have something on its conscience; Peckham suffers more than a virtuous Peckham might be supposed to deserve; the howling neighbourhood of Deptford figures largely in the accounts of the ingenious gentlemen who are out in every wind that blows, and to whom it is an ill high wind that blows no good; but, there can hardly be any Walworth left by this time. It must surely be blown away. I have read of more chimney-stacks and house-copings coming down with terrific smashes at Walworth, and of more sacred edifices being nearly (not quite) blown out to sea from the same accursed locality, than I have read of practised thieves with the appearance

and manners of gentlemen—a popular phenomenon which never existed on earth out of fiction and a police report. Again: I wonder why people are always blown into the Surrey Canal, and into no other piece of water! Why do people get up early and go out in groups, to be blown into the Surrey Canal? Do they say to one another, "Welcome death, so that we get into the newspapers?" Even that would be an insufficient explanation, because even then they might sometimes put themselves in the way of being blown into the Regent's Canal, instead of always saddling Surrey for the field. Some nameless policeman, too, is constantly, on the slightest provocation, getting himself blown into this same Surrey Canal. Will SIR RICHARD MAYNE see to it, and restrain that weak-minded and feeble-bodied constable?

To resume the consideration of the curious question of Refreshment. I am a Briton, and, as such, I am aware that I never will be a slave—and yet I have latent suspicion that there must be some slavery of wrong custom in this matter.

I travel by railroad. I start from home at seven or eight in the morning, after breakfasting hurriedly. What with skimming over the open landscape, what with mining in the damp bowels of the earth, what with banging, booming, and shrieking the scores of miles away, I am hungry when I arrive at the "Refreshment" station where I am expected. Please to observe, expected. I have said, I am hungry; perhaps I might say, with greater point and force, that I am to some extent exhausted, and that I need—in the expressive French sense of the word—to be restored. What is provided for my restoration? The apartment that is to restore me is a wind-trap, cunningly set to inveigle all the draughts in that country-side, and to communicate a special intensity and velocity to them as they rotate in two hurricanes: one, about my wretched head; one, about my wretched legs. The training of the young ladies behind the counter who are to restore me, has been, from their infancy, directed to the assumption of a defiant dramatic show that I am *not* expected. It is in vain for me to represent to them, by my humble and conciliatory manners, that I wish to be liberal. It is in vain for me to represent to myself, for the encouragement of my sinking soul, that the young ladies have a pecuniary interest in my arrival. Neither my reason nor my feelings can make head against the cold glazed glare of eye with which I am assured that I am not expected, and not wanted. The solitary man among the bottles would sometimes take

pity on me, if he dared, but he is powerless against the rights and might of Woman. (Of the page I make no account, for, he is a boy; and therefore the natural enemy of Creation.) Chilling fast, in the deadly tornadoes to which my upper and lower extremities are exposed, and subdued by the moral disadvantage at which I stand, I turn my disconsolate eyes on the refreshments that are to restore me. I find that I must either scald my throat by insanely ladling into it, against time and for no wager, brown hot water stiffened with flour; or I must make myself flaky and sick with Banbury cake; or, I must stuff into my delicate organisation a currant pincushion which I know will swell into immeasurable dimensions when it has got there; or, I must extort from an iron-bound quarry, with a fork, as if I were farming an inhospitable soil, some glutinous lumps of gristle and grease, called pork-pie. While thus forlornly occupied, I find that the depressing banquet on the table is, in every phase of its profoundly unsatisfactory character, so like the banquet at the meanest and shabbiest of evening parties, that I begin to think I must have "brought down" to supper the old lady unknown, blue with cold, who is setting her teeth on edge with a cool orange at my elbow—that the pastrycook, who has compounded for the company on the lowest terms per head, is a fraudulent bankrupt redeeming his contract with the stale stock from his window—that, for some unexplained reason, the family giving the party have become my mortal foes, and have given it on purpose to affront me. Or, I fancy that I am "breaking up" again at the evening conversazione at school, charged two-and-sixpence in the half-year's bill; or breaking down again at that celebrated evening party given at Mrs. Bogles's boarding-house when I was a boarder there, on which occasion Mrs. Bogles was taken in execution by a branch of the legal profession who got in as the harp, and was removed (with the keys and subscribed capital) to a place of durance, half an hour prior to the commencement of the festivities.

Take another case.

Mr. Grazinglands, of the Midland Counties, came to London by railroad one morning last week, accompanied by the amiable and fascinating Mrs. Grazinglands. Mr. G. is a gentleman of a comfortable property, and had a little business to transact at the Bank of England, which required the concurrence and signature of Mrs. G. Their business disposed of, Mr. and Mrs. Grazinglands viewed the Royal Exchange, and the exterior of St. Paul's Cathedral. The spirits of Mrs. Grazinglands then gradually beginning to flag, Mr.

Grazinglands (who is the tenderest of husbands) remarked with sympathy, "Arabella, my dear, I fear you are faint." Mrs. Grazinglands replied, "Alexander, I am rather faint; but don't mind me, I shall be better presently." Touched by the feminine meekness of this answer, Mr. Grazinglands looked in at a pastrycook's window, hesitating as to the expediency of lunching at that establishment. He beheld nothing to eat but butter in various forms, slightly charged with jam, and languidly frizzling over tepid water. Two ancient turtle shells, on which was inscribed the legend "Soups," decorated a glass partition within, enclosing a stuffy alcove, from which a ghastly mockery of a marriage breakfast spread on a rickety table, warned the terrified traveller. An oblong box of stale and broken pastry at reduced prices, mounted on a stool, ornamented the doorway; and two high chairs, that looked as if they were performing on stilts, embellished the counter. Over the whole a young lady presided, whose gloomy haughtiness, as she surveyed the street, announced a deep-seated grievance against society, and an implacable determination to be avenged. From a beetle-haunted kitchen below this institution, fumes arose, suggestive of a class of soup which Mr. Grazinglands knew, from painful experience, enfeebles the mind, distends the stomach, forces itself into the complexion, and tries to ooze out at the eyes. As he decided against entering, and turned away, Mrs. Grazinglands, becoming perceptibly weaker, repeated, "I'm rather faint, Alexander, but don't mind me." Urged to new efforts by these words of resignation, Mr. Grazinglands looked in at a cold and floury baker's shop, where utilitarian buns, unrelieved by a currant, consorted with hard biscuits, a stone filter of cold water, a hard pale clock, and a hard little old woman with flaxen hair, of an undeveloped farinaceous aspect, as if she had been fed upon seeds. He might have entered even here, but for the timely remembrance coming upon him that Jairing's was but round the corner.

Now, Jairing's being an hotel for families and gentlemen, in high repute among the midland counties, Mr. Grazinglands plucked up a great spirit when he told Mrs. Grazinglands she should have a chop there. That lady likewise felt that she was going to see Life. Arriving on that gay and festive scene, they found the second waiter, in a flabby undress, cleaning the windows of the empty coffee-room; and the first waiter, denuded of his white tie, making up his cruets behind the Post-Office Directory. The latter (who took them in hand) was greatly put out by their

patronage, and showed his mind to be troubled by a sense of the pressing necessity of instantly smuggling Mrs. Grazinglands into the obscurest corner of the building. This slighted lady (who is the pride of her division of the county) was immediately conveyed, by several dark passages, and up and down several steps, into a penitential apartment at the back of the house, where five invalided old plate-warmers leaned up against one another under a discarded old melancholy sideboard, and where the wintry leaves of all the dining-tables in the house lay thick. Also, a sofa, of incomprehensible form regarded from any sofane point of view, murmured, "Bed;" while an air of mingled fluffiness and heel-taps added, "Second Waiter's." Secreted in this dismal hold, objects of a mysterious distrust and suspicion, Mr. Grazinglands and his charming partner waited twenty minutes for the smoke (for it never came to a fire), twenty-five minutes for the sherry, half an hour for the table-cloth, forty minutes for the knives and forks, three-quarters of an hour for the chops, and an hour for the potatoes. On settling the little bill—which was not much more than the day's pay of a Lieutenant in the navy—Mr. Grazinglands took heart to remonstrate against the general quality and cost of his reception. To whom the waiter replied, substantially, that Jairing's made it a merit to have accepted him on any terms; "for," added the waiter (unmistakably coughing at Mrs. Grazinglands, the pride of her division of the county), "when individuals is not staying in the 'Ouse, their favours is not as a rule looked upon as making it worth Mr. Jairing's while; nor is it, indeed, a style of business Mr. Jairing wishes." Finally, Mr. and Mrs. Grazinglands passed out of Jairing's Hotel for Families and Gentlemen in a state of the greatest depression, scorned by the bar; and did not recover their self-respect for several days.

Or, take another case. Take your own case.

You are going off by railway from any Terminus. You have twenty minutes for dinner before you go. You want your dinner, and, like Doctor Johnson, Sir, you like to dine. You present to your mind a picture of the refreshment-table at that terminus. The conventional shabby evening-party supper—accepted as the model for all termini and all refreshment stations, because it is the last repast known to this state of existence of which any human creature would partake, but in the direst extremity—sickens your contemplation, and your words are these: "I cannot dine on stale sponge-cakes that turn to sand in the mouth, I cannot dine on shining

brown patties, composed of unknown animals within, and offering to my view the device of an indigestible star-fish in leaden pie-crust without. I cannot dine on a sandwich that has long been pining under an exhausted receiver. I cannot dine on barley-sugar. I cannot dine on Toufée." You repair to the nearest hotel, and arrive, agitated, in the coffee-room.

It is a most astonishing fact that the waiter is very cold to you. Account for it how you may, smooth it over how you will, you cannot deny that he is cold to you. He is not glad to see you, he does not want you, he would much rather you hadn't come. He opposes to your flushed condition an immovable composure. As if this were not enough, another waiter, born, as it would seem, expressly to look at you in this passage of your life, stands at a little distance, with his napkin under his arm and his hands folded, looking at you with all his might. You impress on your waiter that you have ten minutes for dinner, and he proposes that you shall begin with a bit of fish which will be ready in twenty. That proposal declined, he suggests—as a neat originality—"a weal or mutton cutlet." You close with either cutlet, any cutlet, anything. He goes, leisurely, behind a door, and calls down some unseen shaft. A ventriloquial dialogue ensues, tending finally to the effect that weal only is available on the spur of the moment. You anxiously call out, "Veal, then!" Your waiter, having settled that point, returns to array your table-cloth, with a table napkin folded cocked-hat-wise (slowly, for something out of window engages his eye), a white wine-glass, a green wine-glass, a blue finger-glass, a tumbler, and a powerful field battery of fourteen casters with nothing in them; or, at all events—which is enough for your purpose—with nothing in them that will come out. All this time the other waiter looks at you—with an air of mental comparison and curiosity, now, as if it had occurred to him that you are rather like his brother. Half your time gone, and nothing come but the jug of ale and the bread, you implore your waiter to "see after that cutlet, waiter; pray do!" He cannot go at once, for he is carrying in seventeen pounds of American cheese for you to finish with, and a small Landed Estate of celery and water-cresses. The other waiter changes his leg, and takes a new view of you—doubtfully, now, as if he had rejected the resemblance to his brother, and had begun to think you more like his aunt or his grandmother. Again you beseech your waiter, with pathetic indignation, to "see after that cutlet!" He steps out to see after it, and by-and-by, when

you are going away without it, comes back with it. Even then he will not take the sham silver cover off without a pause for a flourish, and a look at the musty cutlet as if he were surprised to see it—which cannot possibly be the case, he must have seen it so often before. A sort of fur has been produced upon its surface by the cook's art, and in a sham silver vessel, staggering on two feet instead of three, is a cutaneous kind of sauce, of brown pimples and pickled cucumber. You order the bill, but your waiter cannot bring your bill yet, because he is bringing, instead, three flinty-hearted potatoes and two grim heads of broccoli, like the occasional ornaments on area railings, badly boiled. You know that you will never come to this pass, any more than to the cheese and the celery, and you imperatively demand your bill; but, it takes time to get, even when gone for, because your waiter has to communicate with a lady who lives behind a sash-window in a corner, and who appears to have to refer to several Ledgers before she can make it out—as if you had been staying there a year. You become distracted to get away, and the other waiter, once more changing his leg, still looks at you—but suspiciously, now, as if you had begun to remind him of the party who took the great-coats last winter. Your bill at last brought and paid, at the rate of sixpence a mouthful, your waiter reproachfully reminds you that “attendance is not charged for a single meal,” and you have to search in all your pockets for sixpence more. He has a worse opinion of you than ever, when you have given it to him, and lets you out into the street with the air of one saying to himself, as you cannot doubt he is, “I hope we shall never see *you* here again!”

Or, take any other of the numerous travelling instances in which, with more time at your disposal, you are, have been, or may be equally ill served. Take the old-established Bull's Head, with its old-established knife-boxes on its old-established sideboards, its old-established flue under its old-established four-post bedsteads in its old-established airless rooms, its old-established frouziness up-stairs and down-stairs, its old-established cookery, and its old-established principles of plunder. Count up your injuries, in its side-dishes of ailing sweetbreads in white poultices, of apothecaries' powders in rice for curry, of pale stewed bits of calf ineffectually relying for an adventitious interest on forcemeat balls. You have had experience of the old-established Bull's Head stringy fowls, with lower extremities like wooden legs, sticking up out of the dish; of its cannibalistic boiled mutton, gush-

ing horribly among its capers when carved; of its little dishes of pastry—roofs of spermaceti ointment, erected over half an apple or four gooseberries. Well for you if you have yet forgotten the old-established Bull's Head fruity port; whose reputation was gained solely by the old-established price the Bull's Head put upon it, and by the old-established air with which the Bull's Head set the glasses and D'Oyleys on, and held that Liquid Gout to the three-and-sixpenny wax candle, as if its old-established colour hadn't come from the dyer's.

Or, lastly, take, to finish with, two cases that we all know every day.

We all know the new hotel near the station, where it is always gusty, going up the lane which is always muddy, where we are sure to arrive at night, and where we make the gas start awfully when we open the front-door. We all know the flooring of the passages and staircases that is too new, and the walls that are too new, and the house that is haunted by the ghost of mortar. We all know the doors that have cracked, and the cracked shutters through which we get a glimpse of the disconsolate moon. We all know the new people who have come to keep the new hotel, and who wish they had never come, and who (inevitable result) wish *we* had never come. We all know how much too scant and smooth and bright the new furniture is, and how it has never settled down, and cannot fit itself into right places, and will get into wrong places. We all know how the gas, being lighted, shows maps of Damp upon the walls. We all know how the ghost of mortar passes into our sand-wich, stirs our negus, goes up to bed with us, ascends the pale bedroom chimney, and prevents the smoke from following. We all know how a leg of our chair comes off at breakfast in the morning, and how the dejected waiter attributes the accident to a general greenness pervading the establishment, and informs us, in reply to a local inquiry, that he is thankful to say he is an entire stranger in that part of the country, and is going back to his own connection on Saturday.

We all know, on the other hand, the great station hotel belonging to the company of proprietors, which has suddenly sprung up in the back outskirts of any place we like to name, and where we look out of our palatial windows, at little back-yards and gardens, old summer-houses, fowl-houses, pigeon-traps, and pigsties. We all know this hotel, in which we can get anything we want, after its kind, for money; but where nobody is glad to see us, or sorry to see us, or minds (our bill paid) whether we come or go,

or how, or when, or why, or cares about us. We all know this hotel, where we have no individuality, but put ourselves into the general post, as it were, and are sorted and disposed of according to our division. We all know that we can get on very well indeed at such a place, but still not perfectly well; and this may be because the place is largely wholesale, and there is a lingering personal retail interest within us that asks to be satisfied.

To sum up. My uncommercial travelling has not yet brought me to the conclusion that we are close to perfection in these matters. And just as I do not believe that the end of the world will ever be near at hand, so long as any of the very tiresome and arrogant people who constantly predict that catastrophe are left in it, so I shall have small faith in the Hotel Millennium while any of the uncomfortable superstitions I have glanced at remain in existence.

VII.

TRAVELLING ABROAD.



I GOT into the travelling chariot—it was of German make, roomy, heavy, and unvarnished—I got into the travelling chariot, pulled up the steps after me, shut myself in with a smart bang of the door, and gave the word “Go on!”

Immediately all that W. and S.W. division of London began to slide away at a pace so lively, that I was over the river, and past the Old Kent Road, and out on Blackheath, and even ascending Shooter's Hill, before I had time to look about me in the carriage, like a collected traveller.

I had two ample Imperials on the roof, other fitted storage for luggage in front, and other up behind; I had a net for books overhead, great pockets to all the windows, a leathern pouch or two hung up for odds and ends, and a reading-lamp fixed in the back of the chariot, in case I should be benighted. I was amply provided in all respects, and had no idea where I was going (which was delightful), except that I was going abroad.

So smooth was the old high-road, and so fresh were the horses, and so fast went I, that it was midway between Gravesend and Rochester, and the widening river was bearing the ships, white sailed, or black smoked, out to sea, when I noticed by the wayside a very queer small boy.

“Holloa!” said I to the very queer small boy, “where do you live?”

“At Chatham,” says he.

“What do you do there?” says I.

“I go to school,” says he.

I took him up in a moment, and we went on. Presently the very queer small boy says, “This is Gads-hill we are coming to, where Falstaff went out to rob those travellers, and ran away.”

“You know something about Falstaff, eh?” said I.

“All about him,” said the very queer small boy. “I am old (I am nine), and I read all sorts of books. But *do* let us stop at the top of the hill, and look at the house there, if you please!”

“You admire that house,” said I.

“Bless you, sir,” said the very queer small boy, “when I was not more than half as old as nine, it used to be a treat for me to be brought to look at it. And, now I am nine, I come by myself to look at it. And ever since I can recollect, my father, seeing me so fond of it, has often said to me, ‘If you were to be very persevering, and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it.’ Though that’s impossible!” said the very queer small boy, drawing a low breath, and now staring at the house out of window with all his might.

I was rather amazed to be told this by the very queer small boy; for that house happens to be *my* house, and I have reason to believe that what he said was true.

Well! I made no halt there, and I soon dropped the very queer small boy, and went on. Over the road where the old Romans used to march, over the road where the old Canterbury pilgrims used to go, over the road where the travelling trains of the old imperious priests and princes used to jingle on horseback between the Continent and this Island through the mud and water, over the road where Shakespeare hummed to himself, “Blow, blow, thou winter wind,” as he sat in the saddle at the gate of the inn yard noticing the carriers; all among the cherry orchards, apple orchards, corn-fields, and hop gardens: so went I, by Canterbury to Dover. There the sea was tumbling in, with deep sounds, after dark, and the revolving French light on Gape Grinez was seen regularly bursting out and becoming obscured, as if the head of a gigantic light-keeper in an anxious state of mind were interposed every half-minute, to look how it was burning.

Early in the morning I was on the deck of the steam-packet, and we were aiming at the bar in the usual intolerable manner, and the bar was

aiming at us in the usual intolerable manner, and the bar got by far the best of it, and we got by far the worst—all in the usual intolerable manner.

But, when I was clear of the Custom House on the other side, and when I began to make the dust fly on the thirsty French roads, and when the twigsome trees by the wayside (which, I suppose, never will grow leafy, for they never did) guarded here and there a dusty soldier, or field labourer, baking on a heap of broken stones, sound asleep in a fiction of shade, I began to recover my travelling spirits. Coming upon the breaker of the broken stones, in a hard hot shining hat, on which the sun played at a distance as on a burning-glass, I felt that now, indeed, I was in the dear old France of my affection. I should have known it, without the well-remembered bottle of rough ordinary wine, the cold roast fowl, the loaf, and the pinch of salt, on which I lunched with unspeakable satisfaction, from one of the stuffed pockets of the chariot.

I must have fallen asleep after lunch, for, when a bright face looked in at the window, I started, and said:

"Good God, Louis, I dreamed you were dead!"

My cheerful servant laughed and answered:

"Me? Not at all, sir."

"How glad I am to wake! What are we doing, Louis?"

We go to take relay of horses. Will you walk up the hill?"

"Certainly."

Welcome the old French hill, with the old French lunatic (not in the most distant degree related to Sterne's Maria) living in a thatched dog-kennel half-way up, and flying out with his crutch and his big head and extended nightcap, to be beforehand with the old men and women exhibiting crippled children, and with the children exhibiting old men and women, ugly and blind, who always seemed by resurrectionary process to be recalled out of the elements for the sudden peopling of the solitude!

"It is well," said I, scattering among them what small coin I had; "here comes Louis, and I am quite roused from my nap."

We journeyed on again, and I welcomed every new assurance that France stood where I had left it. There were the posting-houses, with their archways, dirty stable-yards, and clean postmasters' wives, bright women of business, looking on at the putting-to of the horses; there were the postillions counting what money they got into their hats, and never making

enough of it; there were the standard population of grey horses of Flanders descent, invariably biting one another when they got a chance; there were the fleecy sheep-skins, looped on over their uniforms by the postillions, like bibbed aprons when it blew and rained; there were their jack-books, and their cracking whips; there were the cathedrals that I got out to see, as under some cruel bondage, in nowise desiring to see them; there were the little towns that appeared to have no reason for being towns, since most of their houses were to let, and nobody could be induced to look at them, except the people who couldn't let them, and had nothing else to do but look at them all day. I lay a night upon the road, and enjoyed delectable cookery of potatoes, and some other sensible things, adoption of which at home would inevitably be shown to be fraught with ruin, somehow or other, to that rickety national blessing, the British farmer; and at last I was rattled, like a single pill in a box, over leagues of stones, until—madly cracking, plunging, and flourishing two grey tails about—I made my triumphal entry into Paris.

At Paris I took an upper apartment for a few days in one of the hotels of the Rue de Rivoli; my front windows looking into the garden of the Tuileries (where the principal difference between the nursemaids and the flowers seemed to be that the former were locomotive, and the latter not): my back-windows looking at all the other back-windows in the hotel, and deep down into a paved yard, where my German chariot had retired under a tight-fitting archway, to all appearance for life, and where bells rang all day without anybody's minding them but certain chamberlains with feather brooms and green baize caps, who here and there leaned out of some high window placidly looking down, and where neat waiters with trays on their left shoulders passed and repassed from morning to night.

Whenever I am at Paris. I am dragged by invisible force into the Morgue. I never want to go there, but am always pulled there. One Christmas-day, when I would rather have been anywhere else, I was attracted in, to see an old grey man lying all alone on his cold bed, with a tap of water turned on over his grey hair, and running, drip, drip, drip, down his wretched face until it got to the corner of his mouth, where it took a turn, and made him look sly. One New Year's morning (by the same token, the sun was shining outside, and there was a mountebank balancing a feather on his nose, within a yard of the gate), I was pulled in again

to look at a flaxen-haired boy of eighteen, with a heart hanging on his breast—"from his mother," was engraven on it—who had come into the net across the river, with a bullet wound in his fair forehead, and his hands cut with a knife, but whence or how was a blank mystery. This time I was forced into the same dread place, to see a large dark man whose disfigurement by water was in a frightful manner comic, and whose expression was that of a prize-fighter who had closed his eyelids under a heavy blow, but was going immediately to open them, shake his head, and "come up smiling." Oh, what this large dark man cost me in that bright city!

It was very hot weather, and he was none the better for that, and I was much the worse. Indeed, a very neat and pleasant little woman, with the key of her lodging on her forefinger, who had been showing him to her little girl while she and the child ate sweetmeats, observed monsieur looking poorly as we came out together, and asked monsieur, with her wondering little eyebrows prettily raised, if there were anything the matter? Faintly replying in the negative, monsieur crossed the road to a wine-shop, got some brandy, and resolved to freshen himself with a dip in the great floating bath on the river.

The bath was crowded, in the usual airy manner, by a male population in striped drawers of various gay colours, who walked up and down arm-in-arm, drank coffee, smoked cigars, sat at little tables, conversed politely with the damsels who dispensed the towels, and every now and then pitched themselves into the river head foremost, and came out again to repeat this social routine. I made haste to participate in the water part of the entertainments, and was in the full enjoyment of a delightful bath, when all in a moment I was seized with an unreasonable idea that the large dark body was floating straight at me.

I was out of the river, and dressing instantly. In the shock I had taken some water into my mouth, and it turned me sick, for I fancied that the contamination of the creature was in it. I had got back to my cool darkened room in the hotel, and was lying on a sofa there, before I began to reason with myself.

Of course I knew perfectly well that the large dark creature was stone dead, and that I should no more come upon him out of the place where I had seen him dead, than I should come upon the cathedral of Notre-Dame in an entirely new situation. What troubled me was the picture of the creature: and that had so curiously and strongly painted itself upon my

brain, that I could not get rid of it until it was worn out.

I noticed the peculiarities of this possession while it was a real discomfort to me. That very day, at dinner, some morsel on my plate looked like a piece of him, and I was glad to get up and go out. Later in the evening, I was walking along the Rue St. Honoré, when I saw a bill at a public room there, announcing small-sword exercise, broad-sword exercise, wrestling, and other such feats. I went in, and, some of the sword-play being very skilful, remained. A specimen of our own national sport, the British Boaxe, was announced to be given at the close of the evening. In an evil hour, I determined to wait for this Boaxe, as became a Briton. It was a clumsy specimen (executed by two English grooms out of place), but one of the combatants, receiving a straight right-hander with the glove between his eyes, did exactly what the large dark creature in the Morgue had seemed going to do—and finished me for that night.

There was rather a sickly smell (not at all an unusual fragrance in Paris) in the little ante-room of my apartment at the hotel. The large dark creature in the Morgue was by no direct experience associated with my sense of smell, because, when I came to the knowledge of him, he lay behind a wall of thick plate glass, as good as a wall of steel or marble for that matter. Yet the whiff of the room never failed to reproduce him. What was more curious was, the capriciousness with which his portrait seemed to light itself up in my mind elsewhere. I might be walking in the Palais Royal, lazily enjoying the shop-windows, and might be regaling myself with one of the ready-made clothes shops that are set out there. My eyes, wandering over impossible-waisted dressing-gowns and luminous waistcoats, would fall upon the master, or the shopman, or even the very dummy at the door, and would suggest to me, "Something like him!"—and instantly I was sickened again.

This would happen at the theatre, in the same manner. Often it would happen in the street, when I certainly was not looking for the likeness, and when probably there was no likeness there. It was not because the creature was dead that I was so haunted, because I know that I might have been (and I know it because I have been) equally attended by the image of a living aversion. This lasted about a week. The picture did not fade by degrees, in the sense that it became a whit less forcible and distinct, but in the sense that it obtruded itself less and less frequently. The experience may be worth considering by some who have the

care of children. It would be difficult to overstate the intensity and accuracy of an intelligent child's observation. At that impressive time of life, it must sometimes produce a fixed impression. If the fixed impression be of an object terrible to the child, it will be (for want of reasoning upon) inseparable from great fear. Force the child at such a time, be Spartan with it, send it into the dark against its will, leave it in a lonely bedroom against its will, and you had better murder it.

On a bright morning I rattled away from Paris in the German chariot, and left the large dark creature behind me for good. I ought to confess, though, that I had been drawn back to the Morgue, after he was put underground, to look at his clothes, and that I found them frightfully like him—particularly his boots. However, I rattled away for Switzerland, looking forward, and not backward, and so we parted company.

Welcome again the long long spell of France, with the queer country inns, full of vases of flowers and clocks, in the dull little towns, and with the little population not at all dull on the little Boulevard in the evening, under the little trees! Welcome Monsieur the Curé walking alone in the early morning a short way out of the town, reading that eternal Breviary of yours, which surely might be almost read without book by this time! Welcome Monsieur the Curé, later in the day, jolting through the highway dust (as if you had already ascended to the cloudy region), in a very big-headed cabriolet, with the dried mud of a dozen winters on it. Welcome again Monsieur the Curé, as we exchange salutations; you straightening your back to look at the German chariot, while picking in your little village garden a vegetable or two for the day's soup; I looking out of the German chariot window in that delicious traveller's trance which knows no cares, no yesterdays, no to-morrows, nothing but the passing objects and the passing scents and sounds! And so I came, in due course of delight, to Strasbourg, where I passed a wet Sunday evening at a window, while an idle trifle of a vaudeville was played for me at the opposite house.

How such a large house came to have only three people living in it was its own affair. There were at least a score of windows in its high roof alone; how many in its grotesque front, I soon gave up counting. The owner was a shop-keeper, by name Straudenheim; by trade—I couldn't make out what by trade, for he had forborne to write that up, and his shop was shut.

At first, as I looked at Straudenheim's through the steadily-falling rain, I set him up in business in the goose-liver line. But, inspection of Straudenheim, who became visible at a window on the second floor, convinced me that there was something more precious than liver in the case. He wore a black velvet skull-cap, and looked usurious and rich. A large-lipped, pear-nosed old man, with white hair and keen eyes, though near-sighted. He was writing at a desk, was Straudenheim, and ever and again left off writing, put his pen in his mouth, and went through actions with his right hand, like a man steadying piles of cash. Five-franc pieces, Straudenheim, or golden Napoleons? A jeweller, Straudenheim, a dealer in money, a diamond merchant, or what?

Below Straudenheim, at a window on the first floor, sat his housekeeper—far from young, but of a comely presence, suggestive of a well-matured foot and ankle. She was cheerily dressed, had a fan in her hand, and wore large gold ear-rings and a large gold cross. She would have been out holiday-making (as I settled it) but for the pestilent rain. Strasbourg had given up holiday-making, for that once, as a bad job, because the rain was jerking in gushes out of the old roof-spouts, and running in a brook down the middle of the street. The housekeeper, her arms folded on her bosom and her fan tapping her chin, was bright and smiling at her open window, but otherwise Straudenheim's house-front was very dreary. The housekeeper's was the only open window in it; Straudenheim kept himself close, though it was a sultry evening when air is pleasant, and though the rain had brought into the town that vague refreshing smell of grass which rain does bring in the summer-time.

The dim appearance of a man at Straudenheim's shoulder inspired me with a misgiving that somebody had come to murder that flourishing merchant for the wealth with which I had handsomely endowed him: the rather as it was an excited man, lean and long of figure, and evidently stealthy of foot. But, he conferred with Straudenheim instead of doing him a mortal injury, and then they both softly opened the other window of that room—which was immediately over the housekeeper's—and tried to see her by looking down. And my opinion of Straudenheim was much lowered when I saw that eminent citizen spit out of window, clearly with the hope of spitting on the housekeeper.

The unconscious housekeeper fanned herself, tossed her head, and laughed. Though uncon-

scious of Straudenheim, she was conscious of somebody else—of me?—there was nobody else.

After leaning so far out of window that I confidently expected to see their heels tilt up, Straudenheim and the lean man drew their heads in and shut the window. Presently the house-door secretly opened, and they slowly and spitefully crept forth into the pouring rain. They were coming over to me (I thought) to demand satisfaction for my looking at the housekeeper, when they plunged into a recess in the architecture under my window, and dragged out the puniest of little soldiers, begirt with the most innocent of little swords. The tall glazed head-dress of this warrior Straudenheim instantly knocked off, and out of it fell two sugar-sticks, and three or four large lumps of sugar.

The warrior made no effort to recover his property, or to pick up his shako, but looked with an expression of attention at Straudenheim when he kicked him five times, and also at the lean man when *he* kicked him five times, and again at Straudenheim when he tore the breast of his (the warrior's) little coat open, and shook all his ten fingers in his face, as if they were ten thousand. When these outrages had been committed, Straudenheim and his man went into the house again, and barred the door. A wonderful circumstance was, that the housekeeper, who saw it all (and who could have taken six such warriors to her buxom bosom at once), only fanned herself and laughed as she had laughed before, and seemed to have no opinion about it, one way or other.

But, the chief effect of the drama was the remarkable vengeance taken by the little warrior. Left alone in the rain, he picked up his shako; put it on, all wet and dirty as it was; retired into a court, of which Straudenheim's house formed the corner; wheeled about; and, bringing his two forefingers close to the top of his nose, rubbed them over one another, crosswise, in derision, defiance, and contempt of Straudenheim. Although Straudenheim could not possibly be supposed to be conscious of this strange proceeding, it so inflated and comforted the little warrior's soul, that twice he went away, and twice came back into the court to repeat it, as though it must goad his enemy to madness. Not only that, but he afterwards came back with two other small warriors, and they all three did it together. Not only that—as I live to tell the tale!—but just as it was falling quite dark, the three came back, bringing with them a huge bearded Sapper, whom they moved, by recital of the original wrong, to go through the same performance, with the same complete absence of

all possible knowledge of it on the part of Straudenheim. And then they all went away arm-in-arm, singing. .

I went away too, in the German chariot, at sunrise, and rattled on, day after day, like one in a sweet dream; with so many clear little bells on the harness of the horses, that the nursery rhyme about Banbury Cross, and the venerable lady who rode in state there, was always in my ears. And now I came to the land of wooden houses, innocent cakes, thin butter soup, and spotless little inn bedrooms with a family likeness to Dairies. And now the Swiss marksmen were for ever rifle-shooting at marks across gorges, so exceedingly near my ear, that I felt like a new Gesler in a Canton of Tells, and went in highly-deserved danger of my tyrannical life. The prizes at these shootings were watches, smart handkerchiefs, hats, spoons, and (above all) tea-trays; and at these contests I came upon a more than usually accomplished and amiable countryman of my own, who had shot himself deaf in whole years of competition, and had won so many tea-trays that he went about the country with his carriage full of them, like a glorified Cheap Jack.

In the mountain country into which I had now travelled, a yoke of oxen were sometimes hooked on before the post-horses, and I went lumbering up, up, up, through mist and rain, with the roar of falling water for change of music. Of a sudden, mist and rain would clear away, and I would come down into picturesque little towns with gleaming spires and odd towers; and would stroll afoot into market-places in steep winding streets, where a hundred women in bodices sold eggs and honey, butter and fruit, and suckled their children as they sat by their clean baskets, and had such enormous goitres (or glandular swellings in the throat), that it became a science to know where the nurse ended and the child began. About this time I deserted my German chariot for the back of a mule (in colour and consistency so very like a dusty old hair trunk I once had at school, that I half expected to see my initials in brass-headed nails on his back-bone), and went up a thousand rugged ways, and looked down at a thousand woods of fir and pine, and would, on the whole, have preferred my mule's keeping a little nearer to the inside, and not usually travelling with a hoof or two over the precipice—though much consoled by explanation that this was to be attributed to his great sagacity, by reason of his carrying broad loads of wood at other times, and not being clear but that I myself belonged to that station of life, and required

as much room as they. He brought me safely, in his own wise way, among the passes of the Alps, and here I enjoyed a dozen climates a day; being now (like Don Quixote on the back of the wooden horse) in the region of wind, now in the region of fire, now in the region of unmelted ice and snow. Here I passed over trembling domes of ice, beneath which the cataract was roaring; and here was received under arches of icicles of unspeakable beauty; and here the sweet air was so bracing and so light, that at halting-times I rolled in the snow when I saw my mule do it, thinking that he must know best. At this part of the journey we would come, at mid-day, into half an hour's thaw: when the rough mountain inn would be found on an island of deep mud in a sea of snow, while the bailing strings of mules, and the carts full of casks and bales, which had been in an Arctic condition a mile off, would steam again. By such ways and means, I would come to the cluster of chalets where I had to turn out of the track to see the water-fall; and then, uttering a howl like a young giant, on espying a traveller—in other words, something to eat—coming up the steep, the idiot lying on the wood-pile, who sunned himself and nursed his goitre, would rouse the woman-guide within the hut, who would stream out hastily, throwing her child over one of her shoulders, and her goitre over the other, as she came along. I slept at religious houses, and bleak refuges of many kinds, on this journey, and by the stove at night heard stories of travellers who had perished within call, in wreaths and drifts of snow. One night the stove within, and the cold outside, awakened childish associations long forgotten, and I dreamed I was in Russia—the identical serf out of a picture-book I had, before I could read it for myself—and that I was going to be knouted by a noble personage in a fur cap, boots, and ear-rings, who, I think, must have come out of some melodrama.

Commend me to the beautiful waters among these mountains! Though I was not of their mind: they, being inveterately bent on getting down into the level country, and I ardently desiring to linger where I was. What desperate leaps they took, what dark abysses they plunged into, what rocks they wore away, what echoes they invoked! In one part where I went, they were pressed into the service of carrying wood down, to be burnt next winter, as costly fuel, in Italy. But, their fierce savage nature was not to be easily constrained, and they fought with every limb of the wood; whirling it round and round, stripping its bark away, dashing it against

pointed corners, driving it out of the course, and roaring and flying at the peasants who steered it back again from the bank with long stout poles. Alas! concurrent streams of time and water carried me down fast, and I came, on an exquisitely clear day, to the Lausanne shore of the Lake of Geneva, where I stood looking at the bright blue water, the flushed white mountains opposite, and the boats at my feet with their furled Mediterranean sails, showing like enormous magnifications of this goose-quill pen that is now in my hand.

—The sky became overcast without any notice; a wind very like the March east wind of England blew across me; and a voice said, "How do you like it? Will it do?"

I had merely shut myself, for half a minute, in a German travelling chariot that stood for sale in the Carriage Department of the London Pantechnicon. I had a commission to buy it for a friend who was going abroad; and the look and manner of the chariot, as I tried the cushions and the springs, brought all these hints of travelling remembrance before me.

"It will do very well," said I rather sorrowfully, as I got out at the other door, and shut the carriage up.

VIII.

THE GREAT TASMANIA'S CARGO.



TRAVEL constantly up and down a certain line of railway that has a terminus in London. It is the railway for a large military dépôt, and for other large barracks. To the best of my serious belief, I have never been on that railway by daylight without seeing some handcuffed deserters in the train.

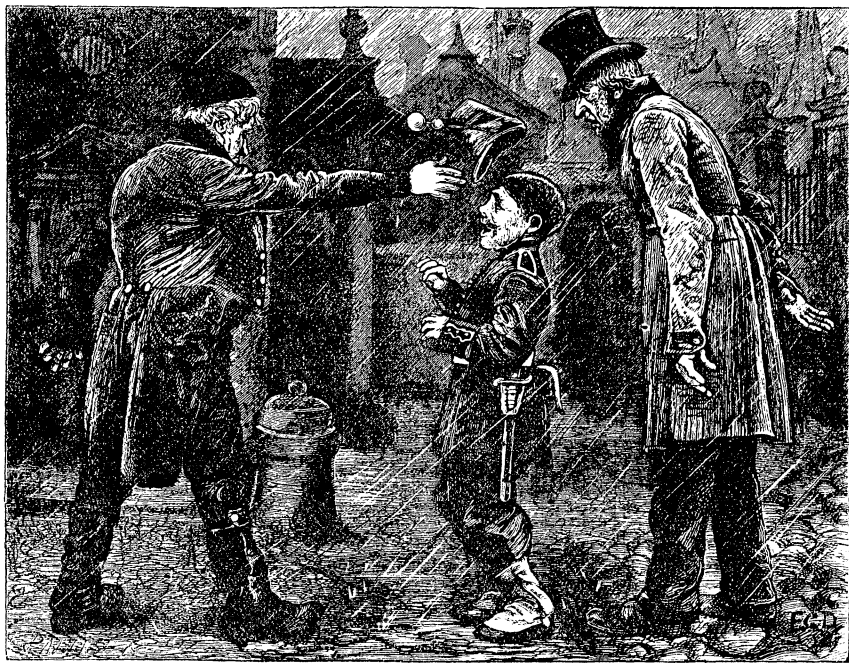
It is in the nature of things that such an institution as our English army should have many bad and troublesome characters in it. But, this is a reason for, and not against, its being made as acceptable as possible to well-disposed men of decent behaviour. Such men are assuredly not tempted into the ranks by the beastly inversion of natural laws, and the compulsion to live in worse than swinish foulness. Accordingly, when any such Circumlocutional embellishments of the soldier's condition have of late been brought to notice, we civilians, seated in outer darkness cheerfully meditating on an Income Tax, have considered the matter as being our business, and have shown a tendency to declare that we would rather not have it misregulated, if

such declaration may, without violence to the Church Catechism, be hinted to those who are put in authority over us.

Any animated description of a modern battle, any private soldier's letter published in the newspapers, any page of the records of the Victoria Cross, will show that in the ranks of the army there exists, under all disadvantages, as fine a sense of duty as is to be found in any station on earth. Who doubts that, if we all did our duty as faithfully as the soldier does his, this world

would be a better place? There may be greater difficulties in our way than in the soldier's. Not disputed. But, let us at least do our duty towards *him*.

I had got back again to that rich and beautiful port where I had looked after Mercantile Jack, and I was walking up a hill there, on a wild March morning. My conversation with my official friend Pangloss, by whom I was accidentally accompanied, took this direction as we took the uphill direction, because the object of



"THE TALL GLAZED HEAD-DRESS OF THIS WARRIOR STRAUDENHEIM INSTANTLY KNOCKED OFF."

my uncommercial journey was to see some discharged soldiers who had recently come home from India. There were men of HAVELOCK's among them; there were men who had been in many of the great battles of the great Indian campaign among them; and I was curious to note what our discharged soldiers looked like when they were done with.

I was not the less interested (as I mentioned to my official friend Pangloss) because these men

had claimed to be discharged, when their right to be discharged was not admitted. They had behaved with unblemished fidelity and bravery; but, a change of circumstances had arisen, which, as they considered, put an end to their compact, and entitled them to enter on a new one. Their demand had been blunderingly resisted by the authorities in India; but, it is to be presumed that the men were not far wrong, inasmuch as the bungle had ended in their being

sent home discharged, in pursuance of orders from home. (There was an immense waste of money, of course.)

Under these circumstances—thought I, as I walked up the hill on which I accidentally encountered my official friend—under these circumstances of the men having successfully opposed themselves to the Pagoda Department of that great Circumlocution Office on which the sun never sets and the light of reason never rises, the Pagoda Department will have been particularly careful of the national honour. It will have shown these men, in the scrupulous good faith, not to say the generosity, of its dealing with them, that great national authorities can have no small retaliations and revenges. It will have made every provision for their health on the passage home, and will have landed them, restored from their campaigning fatigues by a sea voyage, pure air, sound food, and good medicines. And I pleased myself with dwelling beforehand on the great accounts of their personal treatment which these men would carry into their various towns and villages, and on the increasing popularity of the service that would insensibly follow. I almost began to hope that the hitherto never-failing deserters on my railroad would by-and-by become a phenomenon.

In this agreeable frame of mind I entered the workhouse of Liverpool.—For the cultivation of laurels in a sandy soil had brought the soldiers in question to *that* abode of Glory.

Before going into their wards to visit them, I inquired how they had made their triumphant entry there? They had been brought through the rain in carts, it seemed, from the landing-place to the gate, and had then been carried up-stairs on the backs of paupers. Their groans and pains, during the performance of this glorious pageant, had been so distressing as to bring tears into the eyes of spectators but too well accustomed to scenes of suffering. The men were so dreadfully cold, that those who could get near the fires were hard to be restrained from thrusting their feet in among the blazing coals. They were so horribly reduced, that they were awful to look upon. Racked with dysentery, and blackened with scurvy, one hundred and forty wretched soldiers had been revived with brandy, and laid in bed.

My official friend Pangloss is lineally descended from a learned doctor of that name, who was once tutor to Candide, an ingenious young gentleman of some celebrity. In his personal character he is as humane and worthy a gentleman as any I know; in his official capacity he unfortunately preaches the doctrines of

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his renowned ancestor, by demonstrating on all occasions that we live in the best of all possible official worlds.

"In the name of 'Humanity,'" said I, "how did the men fall into this deplorable state? Was the ship well found in stores?"

"I am not here to asseverate that I know the fact of my own knowledge," answered Pangloss, "but I have grounds for asserting that the stores were the best of all possible stores."

A medical officer laid before us a handful of rotten biscuit, and a handful of split peas. The biscuit was a honeycombed heap of maggots, and the excrement of maggots. The peas were even harder than this filth. A similar handful had been experimentally boiled six hours, and had shown no signs of softening. These were the stores on which the soldiers had been fed.

"The beef——" I began, when Pangloss cut me short.

"Was the best of all possible beef," said he.

But, behold, there was laid before us certain evidence given at the Coroner's Inquest, holden on some of the men (who had obstinately died of their treatment), and from that evidence it appeared that the beef was the worst of possible beef!

"Then I lay my hand upon my heart, and take my stand," said Pangloss, "by the pork, which was the best of all possible pork."

"But look at this food before our eyes, if one may so misuse the word," said I. "Would any Inspector who did his duty pass such abomination?"

"It ought not to have been passed," Pangloss admitted.

"Then the authorities out there——" I began, when Pangloss cut me short again.

"There would certainly seem to have been something wrong somewhere," said he; "but I am prepared to prove that the authorities out there are the best of all possible authorities."

I never heard of any impeached public authority in my life who was not the best public authority in existence.

"We are told of these unfortunate men being laid low by scurvy," said I. "Since lime-juice has been regularly stored and served out in our navy, surely that disease, which used to devastate it, has almost disappeared? Was there lime-juice aboard this transport?"

My official friend was beginning, "The best of all possible——" when an inconvenient medical forefinger pointed out another passage in the evidence, from which it appeared that the lime-juice had been bad too. Not to mention

that the vinegar had been bad too, the vegetables bad too, the cooking accommodation insufficient (if there had been anything worth mentioning to cook), the water supply exceedingly inadequate, and the beer sour.

"Then the men," said Pangloss, a little irritated, "were the worst of all possible men."

"In what respect?" I asked.

"Oh! Habitual drunkards," said Pangloss.

But, again the same incorrigible medical forefinger pointed out another passage in the evidence, showing that the dead men had been examined after death, and that they, at least, could not possibly have been habitual drunkards, because the organs within them, which must have shown traces of that habit, were perfectly sound.

"And besides," said the three doctors present, one and all, "habitual drunkards brought as low as these men have been, could not recover under care and food, as the great majority of these men are recovering. They would not have strength of constitution to do it."

"Reckless and improvident dogs, then," said Pangloss. "Always are—nine times out of ten."

I turned to the master of the workhouse, and asked him whether the men had any money?

"Money?" said he. "I have in my iron safe nearly four hundred pounds of theirs; the agents have nearly a hundred pounds more; and many of them have left money in Indian banks besides."

"Hah!" said I to myself as we went up-stairs, "this is not the best of all possible stories, I doubt!"

We went into a large ward, containing some twenty or five-and-twenty beds. We went into several such wards, one after another. I find it very difficult to indicate what a shocking sight I saw in them, without frightening the reader from the perusal of these lines, and defeating my object of making it known.

Oh, the sunken eyes that turned to me as I walked between the rows of beds, or—worse still—that glazedly looked at the white ceiling, and saw nothing, and cared for nothing! Here lay the skeleton of a man, so lightly covered with a thin unwholesome skin, that not a bone in the anatomy was clothed, and I could clasp the arm, above the elbow, in my finger and thumb. Here lay a man with the black scurvy eating his legs away, his gums gone, and his teeth all gaunt and bare. This bed was empty, because gangrene had set in, and the patient had died but yesterday. That bed was a hopeless one, because its occupant was sinking fast, and could only be roused to turn the poor

pinched mask of face upon the pillow with a feeble moan. The awful thinness of the fallen cheeks, the awful brightness of the deep set eyes, the lips of lead, the hands of ivory, the recumbent human images lying in the shadow of death with a kind of solemn twilight on them, like the sixty who had died aboard the ship, and were lying at the bottom of the sea, O Pangloss, God forgive you!

In one bed lay a man whose life had been saved (as it was hoped) by deep incisions in the feet and legs. While I was speaking to him, a nurse came up to change the poultices which this operation had rendered necessary, and I had an instinctive feeling that it was not well to turn away, merely to spare myself. He was sorely wasted and keenly susceptible, but the efforts he made to subdue any expression of impatience or suffering were quite heroic. It was easy to see, in the shrinking of the figure, and the drawing of the bedclothes over the head, how acute the endurance was, and it made me shrink too, as if I were in pain; but, when the new bandages were on, and the poor feet were composed again, he made an apology for himself (though he had not uttered a word), and said plaintively, "I am so tender and weak, you see, sir!" Neither from him, nor from any one sufferer of the whole ghastly number, did I hear a complaint. Of thankfulness for present solitude and care, I heard much: of complaint, not a word.

I think I could have recognised, in the dimmest skeleton there, the ghost of a soldier. Something of the old air was still latent in the palest shadow of life I talked to. One emaciated creature, in the strictest literality worn to the bone, lay stretched on his back, looking so like death that I asked one of the doctors if he were not dying, or dead? A few kind words from the doctor in his ear, and he opened his eyes, and smiled—looked, in a moment, as if he would have made a salute, if he could. "We shall pull him through, please God," said the doctor. "Plase God, surr, and thankye," said the patient. "You are much better to-day; are you not?" said the doctor. "Plase God, surr; 'tis the slape I want, surr; 'tis my breathin' makes the nights so long." "He is a careful fellow this, you must know," said the doctor cheerfully; "it was raining hard when they put him in the open cart to bring him here, and he had the presence of mind to ask to have a sovereign taken out of his pocket that he had there, and a cab engaged. Probably it saved his life." The patient rattled out the skeleton of a laugh, and said, proud of the story, "Deed, surr, an open cairt was a

comical means o' bringin' a dyin' man here, and a clever way to kill him." You might have sworn to him for a soldier when he said it.

One thing had perplexed me very much in going from bed to bed. A very significant and cruel thing. I could find no young man but one. He had attracted my notice by having got up and dressed himself in his soldier's jacket and trousers, with the intention of sitting by the fire; but he had found himself too weak, and had crept back to his bed, and laid himself down on the outside of it. I could have pronounced him, alone, to be a young man aged by famine and sickness. As we were standing by the Irish soldier's bed, I mentioned my perplexity to the doctor. He took a board with an inscription on it from the head of the Irishman's bed, and asked me what age I supposed that man to be? I had observed him with attention while talking to him, and answered, confidently, "Fifty." The doctor, with a pitying glance at the patient, who had dropped into a stupor again, put the board back, and said, "Twenty-four."

All the arrangements of the wards were excellent. They could not have been more humane, sympathising, gentle, attentive, or wholesome. The owners of the ship, too, had done all they could liberally. There were bright fires in every room, and the convalescent men were sitting round them, reading various papers and periodicals. I took the liberty of inviting my official friend Pangloss to look at those convalescent men, and to tell me whether their faces and bearing were or were not, generally, the faces and bearing of steady, respectable soldiers? The master of the workhouse, overhearing me, said he had had a pretty large experience of troops, and that better-conducted men than these he had never had to do with. They were always (he added) as we saw them. And of us visitors (I add) they knew nothing whatever, except that we were there.

It was audacious in me, but I took another liberty with Pangloss. Prefacing it with the observation that, of course, I knew beforehand that there was not the faintest desire, anywhere, to hush up any part of this dreadful business, and that the Inquest was the fairest of all possible Inquests, I besought four things of Pangloss. Firstly, to observe that the Inquest *was not held in that place*, but at some distance off. Secondly, to look round upon those helpless spectres in their beds. Thirdly, to remember that the witnesses produced from among them before that Inquest could not have been selected because they were the men who had the most

to tell it, but because they happened to be in a state admitting of their safe removal. Fourthly, to say whether the Coroner and Jury could have come there, to those pillows, and taken a little evidence? My official friend declined to commit himself to a reply.

There was a sergeant, reading; in one of the fireside groups. As he was a man of very intelligent countenance, and as I have a great respect for non-commissioned officers as a class, I sat down on the nearest bed, to have some talk with him. (It was the bed of one of the grisliest of the poor skeletons, and he died soon afterwards.)

"I was glad to see, in the evidence of an officer at the Inquest, sergeant, that he never saw men behave better on board ship than these men."

"They did behave very well, sir."

"I was glad to see, too, that every man had a hammock."

The sergeant gravely shook his head. "There must be some mistake, sir. The men of my own mess had no hammocks. There were not hammocks enough on board, and the men of the two next messes laid hold of hammocks for themselves as soon as they got on board, and squeezed my men out, as I may say."

"Had the squeezed-out men none, then?"

"None, sir. As men died, their hammocks were used by other men who wanted hammocks; but many men had none at all."

"Then you don't agree with the evidence on that point?"

"Certainly not, sir. A man can't, when he knows to the contrary."

"Did any of the men sell their bedding for drink?"

"There is some mistake on that point too, sir. Men were under the impression—I knew it for a fact at the time—that it was not allowed to take blankets or bedding on board, and so men who had things of that sort came to sell them purposely."

"Did any of the men sell their clothes for drink?"

"They did, sir." (I believe there never was a more truthful witness than the sergeant. He had no inclination to make out a case.)

"Many?"

"Some, sir" (considering the question). "Soldier-like. They had been long marching in the rainy season, by bad roads—no roads at all, in short—and, when they got to Calcutta, men turned to and drank before taking a last look at it. Soldier-like."

"Do you see any men in this ward; for

example, who sold clothes for drink at that time?"

The sergeant's wan eye, happily just beginning to rekindle with health, travelled round the place, and came back to me. "Certainly, sir."

"The marching to Calcutta in the rainy season must have been severe?"

"It was very severe, sir."

"Yet, what with the rest and the sea air, I should have thought that the men (even the men who got drunk) would have soon begun to recover on board ship?"

"So they might; but the bad food told upon them, and, when we got into a cold latitude, it began to tell more, and the men dropped."

"The sick had a general disinclination for food, I am told, sergeant?"

"Have you seen the food, sir?"

"Some of it."

"Have you seen the state of their mouths, sir?"

If the sergeant, who was a man of a few orderly words, had spoken the amount of this volume, he could not have settled that question better. I believe the sick could as soon have eaten the ship as the ship's provisions.

I took the additional liberty with my friend Pangloss, when I had left the sergeant with good wishes, of asking Pangloss whether he had ever heard of biscuit getting drunk, and bartering its nutritious qualities for putrefaction and vermin; of peas becoming hardened in liquor; of ham-mocks drinking themselves off the face of the earth; of lime-juice, vegetables, vinegar, cooking accommodation, water supply, and beer, all taking to drinking together, and going to ruin? "If not (I asked him), what did he say in defence of the officers condemned by the Coroner's Jury, who, by signing the General Inspection Report relative to the ship *Great Tasmania*, chartered for these troops, had deliberately asserted all that bad and poisonous dunghill refuse to be good and wholesome food?" My official friend replied that it was a remarkable fact, that whereas some officers were only positively good, and other officers only comparatively better, those particular officers were superlatively the very best of all possible officers.

My hand and my heart fail me in writing my record of this journey. The spectacle of the soldiers in the hospital beds of that Liverpool workhouse (a very good workhouse, indeed, be it understood) was so shocking and so shameful, that, as an Englishman, I blush to remember it. It would have been simply unbearable at the time, but for the consideration and pity with which they were soothed in their sufferings.

No punishment that our inefficient laws provide is worthy of the name, when set against the guilt of this transaction. But, if the memory of it die out unavenged, and if it do not result in the inexorable dismissal and disgrace of those who are responsible for it, their escape will be infamous to the Government (no matter of what party) that so neglects its duty, and infamous to the nation that tamely suffers such intolerable wrong to be done in its name.

IX.

CITY OF LONDON CHURCHES.

IF the confession that I have often travelled from this Covent-Garden lodging of mine on Sundays should give offence to those who never travel on Sundays, they will be satisfied (I hope) by my adding that the journeys in question were made to churches.

Not that I have any curiosity to hear powerful preachers. Time was when I was dragged by the hair of my head, as one may say, to hear too many. On summer evenings, when every flower, and tree, and bird might have better addressed my soft young heart, I have, in my day, been caught in the palm of a female hand by the crown, have been violently scrubbed from the neck to the roots of the hair as a purification for the Temple, and have then been carried off, highly charged with saponaceous electricity, to be steamed like a potato in the unventilated breath of the powerful Boanerges Boiler and his congregation, until what small mind I had was quite steamed out of me. In which pitiable plight I have been haled out of the place of meeting, at the conclusion of the exercises, and catechised respecting Boanerges Boiler, his fifthly, his sixthly, and his seventhly, until I have regarded that reverend person in the light of a most dismal and oppressive Charade. Time was when I was carried off to platform assemblages at which no human child, whether of wrath or grace, could possibly keep its eyes open, and when I felt the fatal sleep stealing, stealing over me, and when I gradually heard the orator in possession spinning and humming like a great top, until he rolled, collapsed, and tumbled over, and I discovered, to my burning shame and fear, that as to that last stage it was not he, but I. I have sat under Boanerges when he has specifically addressed himself to us—us,

the infants—and at this present writing I hear his lumbering jocularly (which never amused us, though we basely pretended that it did), and I behold his big round face, and I look up the inside of his outstretched coat-sleeve as if it were a telescope with the stopper on, and I hate him with an unwholesome hatred for two hours. Through such means did it come to pass that I knew the powerful preacher from beginning to end, all over and all through, while I was very young, and that I left him behind at an early period of life. Peace be with him! More peace than he brought to me!

Now, I have heard many preachers since that time—not powerful; merely Christian, unaffected, and reverential—and I have had many such preachers on my roll of friends. But, it was not to hear these, any more than the powerful class, that I made my Sunday journeys. They were journeys of curiosity to the numerous churches in the City of London. It came into my head one day, here had I been cultivating a familiarity with all the churches of Rome, and I knew nothing of the insides of the old churches of London! This befell on a Sunday morning. I began my expeditions that very same day, and they lasted me a year.

I never wanted to know the names of the churches to which I went, and to this hour I am profoundly ignorant in that particular of at least nine-tenths of them. Indeed, saving that I know the church of old GOWER's tomb (he lies in effigy with his head upon his books) to be the church of St. Saviour's, Southwark; and the Church of MILTON's tomb to be the church of Cripplegate; and the church on Cornhill with the great golden keys to be the church of St. Peter; I doubt if I could pass a competitive examination in any of the names. No question did I ever ask of living creature concerning these churches, and no answer to any antiquarian question on the subject that I ever put to books shall harass the reader's soul. A full half of my pleasure in them arose out of their mystery; mysterious I found them; mysterious they shall remain for me.

Where shall I begin my round of hidden and forgotten old churches in the City of London?

It is twenty minutes short of eleven on a Sunday morning, when I stroll down one of the many narrow hilly streets in the City that tend due south to the Thames. It is my first experiment, and I have come to the region of Whittington in an omnibus, and we have put down a fierce-eyed spare old woman, whose slate-coloured gown smells of herbs, and who walked up Aldersgate Street to some chapel where she

comforts herself with brimstone doctrine, I warrant. We have also put down a stouter and sweeter old lady, with a pretty large Prayer-book in an unfolded pocket-handkerchief, who got out at a corner of a court near Stationers' Hall, and who, I think, must go to church there because she is the widow of some deceased old Company's Beadle. The rest of our freight were mere chance pleasure-seekers and rural walkers, and went on to the Blackwall Railway. So many bells are ringing, when I stand undecided at a street corner, that every sheep in the ecclesiastical fold might be a bell-wether. The discordance is fearful. My state of indecision is referable to, and about equally divisible among, four great churches, which are all within sight and sound, all within the space of a few square yards.

As I stand at the street corner, I don't see as many as four people at once going to church, though I see as many as four churches with their steeples clamouring for people. I choose my church, and go up the flight of steps to the great entrance in the tower. A mouldy tower within, and like a neglected wash-house. A rope comes through the beamed roof, and a man in the corner pulls it and clashes the bell—a whitish-brown man, whose clothes were once black—a man with flue on him, and cobweb. He stares at me, wondering how I come there, and I stare at him, wondering how he comes there. Through a screen of wood and glass I peep into the dim church. About twenty people are discernible, waiting to begin. Christening would seem to have faded out of this church long ago, for the font has the dust of desuetude thick upon it, and its wooden cover (shaped like an old-fashioned tureen cover) looks as if it wouldn't come off upon requirement. I perceive the altar to be rickety, and the Commandments damp. Entering after this survey, I jostle the clergyman in his canonicals, who is entering too from a dark lane behind a pew of state with curtains, where nobody sits. The pew is ornamented with four blue wands, once carried by four somebodies, I suppose, before somebody else, but which there is nobody now to hold or receive honour from. I open the door of a family pew, and shut myself in; if I could occupy twenty family pews at once, I might have them. The clerk, a brisk young man (how does *he* come here?), glances at me knowingly, as who should say, "You have done it now; you must stop." Organ plays. Organ-loft is in a small gallery across the church; gallery congregation, two girls. I wonder within myself what will happen when we are required to sing.

There is a pale heap of books in the corner of my pew, and while the organ, which is hoarse and sleepy, plays in such fashion that I can hear more of the rusty working of the stops than of any music, I look at the books, which are mostly bound in faded baize and stuff. They belonged, in 1754, to the Dowgate family; and who were they? Jane Comport must have married Young Dowgate, and come into the family that way; Young Dowgate was courting Jane Comport when he gave her her Prayer-book, and recorded the presentation in the fly-leaf; if Jane were fond of Young Dowgate, why did she die and leave the book here? Perhaps at the rickety altar, and before the damp Commandments, she, Comport, had taken him, Dowgate, in a flush of youthful hope and joy, and perhaps it had not turned out in the long-run as great a success as was expected?

The opening of the service recalls my wandering thoughts. I, then find, to my astonishment, that I have been, and still am, taking a strong kind of invisible snuff up my nose, into my eyes, and down my throat. I wink, sneeze, and cough. The clerk sneezes; the clergyman winks; the unseen organist sneezes and coughs (and probably winks); all our little party wink, sneeze, and cough. The snuff seems to be made of the decay of matting, wood, cloth, stone, iron, earth, and something else. Is the something else the decay of dead citizens in the vaults below? As sure as Death it is! Not only in the cold damp February day do we cough and sneeze dead citizens all through the service, but dead citizens have got into the very bellows of the organ, and half choked the same. We stamp our feet to warm them, and dead citizens arise in heavy clouds. Dead citizens stick upon the walls, and lie pulverised on the sounding-board over the clergyman's head, and, when a gust of air comes, tumble down upon him.

In this first experience I was so nauseated by too much snuff, made of the Dowgate family, the Comport branch, and other families and branches, that I gave but little heed to our dull manner of ambling through the service; to the brisk clerk's manner of encouraging us to try a note or two at psalm time; to the gallery congregation's manner of enjoying a shrill duet, without a notion of time or tune; to the whity-brown man's manner of shutting the minister into the pulpit, and being very particular with the lock of the door, as if he were a dangerous animal. But, I tried again next Sunday, and soon accustomed myself to the dead citizens, when I found that I could not possibly get on without them among the City churches.

Another Sunday.

After being again rung for by conflicting bells, like a leg of mutton or a laced hat a hundred years ago, I make selection of a church oddly put away in a corner among a number of lanes—a smaller church than the last, and an ugly: of about the date of Queen Anne. As a congregation, we are fourteen strong; not counting an exhausted clarity school in a gallery, which has dwindled away to four boys and two girls. In the porch is a benefaction of loaves of bread, which there would seem to be nobody left in the exhausted congregation to claim, and which I saw an exhausted beadle, long faded out of uniform, eating with his eyes for self and family when I passed in. There is also an exhausted clerk in a brown wig, and two or three exhausted doors and windows have been bricked up, and the service books are musty, and the pulpit cushions are threadbare, and the whole of the church furniture is in a very advanced stage of exhaustion. We are three old women (habitual), two young lovers (accidental), two tradesmen, one with a wife and one alone, an aunt and nephew, again two girls (these two girls dressed out for church, with everything about them limp that should be stiff, and *vice versa*, are an invariable experience), and three sniggering boys. The clergyman is, perhaps, the chaplain of a civic company; he has the moist and vinous look, eke the bulbous boots, of one acquainted with 'Twenty port and comet vintages.

We are so quiet in our dulness, that the three sniggering boys, who have got away into a corner by the altar railing, give us a start, like crackers, whenever they laugh. And this reminds me of my own village church, where, during sermon-time on bright Sundays when the birds are very musical indeed, farmers' boys patter out over the stone pavement, and the clerk steps out from his desk after them, and is distinctly heard in the summer repose to pursue and punch them in the churchyard, and is seen to return with a meditative countenance, making believe that nothing of the sort has happened. The aunt and nephew in this City church are much disturbed by the sniggering boys. The nephew is himself a boy, and the sniggerers tempt him to secular thoughts of marbles and string, by secretly offering such commodities to his distant contemplation. This young St. Anthony for awhile resists, but presently becomes a backslider, and in dumb-show defies the sniggerers to "heave" a marble or two in his direction. Herein he is detected by the aunt (a rigorous reduced gentlewoman who has

the charge of offices), and I perceive that worthy relative to poke him in the side with the corrugated hooked handle of an ancient umbrella. The nephew revenges himself for this by holding his breath, and terrifying his kinswoman with the dread belief that he has made up his mind to burst. Regardless of whispers and shakes, he swells and becomes discoloured, and yet again swells and becomes discoloured, until the aunt can bear it no longer, but leads him out, with no visible neck, and with his eyes going before him like a prawn's. This causes the sniggerers to regard flight as 'an eligible move, and I know which of them will go out first, because of the over-devout attention that he suddenly concentrates on the clergyman. In a little while, this hypocrite, with an elaborate demonstration of hushing his footsteps, and with a face generally expressive of having until now forgotten a religious appointment elsewhere, is gone. Number Two gets out in the same way, but rather quicker. Number Three, getting safely to the door, there turns reckless, and, banging it open, flies forth with a Whoop! that vibrates to the top of the tower above us.

The clergyman, who is of a prandial presence and a muffled voice, may be scant of hearing as well as of breath, but he only glances up as having an idea that somebody has said Amen in a wrong place, and continues his steady jog-trot, like a farmer's wife going to market. He does all he has to do in the same easy way, and gives us a concise sermon, still like the jog-trot of the farmer's wife on a level road. Its drowsy cadence soon lulls the three old women asleep, and the unmarried tradesman sits looking out at window, and the married tradesman sits looking at his wife's bonnet, and the lovers sit looking at one another, so superlatively happy, that I mind when I, turned of eighteen, went with my Angelica to a City church on account of a shower (by this special coincidence that it was in Huggin' Lane), and when I said to my Angelica, "Let the blessed evert, Angelica, occur at no altar but this!" and when my Angelica consented that it should occur at no other—which it certainly never did, for it never occurred anywhere. And oh, Angelica! what has become of you this present Sunday morning when I can't attend to the sermon? and, more difficult question than that, what has become of Me as I was when I sat by your side?

But, we receive the signal to make that unanimous dive which surely is a little conventional—like the strange rustlings and settlings and clearings of throats and noses, which are never dispensed with at certain points of the church

service, and are never held to be necessary under any other circumstances. In a minute more it is all over, and the organ expresses itself to be as glad of it as it can be of anything in its rheumatic state, and in another minute we are all of us out of the church, and Whity-brown has locked it up. Another minute, or little more, and, in the neighbouring churchyard—not the yard of that church, but of another—a churchyard like a great shabby old mignonette box with two trees in it, and one tomb—I meet Whity-brown, in his private capacity, fetching a pint of beer for his dinner from the public-house in the corner, where the keys of the rotting fire-ladders are kept, and were never asked for, and where there is a ragged, white-seamed, out-elbowed bagatelle board on the first floor.

In one of these City churches, and only in one, I found an individual who might have been claimed as expressly a City personage. I remember the church by the feature that the clergyman couldn't get to his own desk without going through the clerk's, or couldn't get to the pulpit without going through the reading-desk—I forget which, and it is no matter—and by the presence of this personage among the exceedingly sparse congregation. I doubt if we were a dozen, and we had no exhausted charity school to help us out. The personage was dressed in black of square cut, and was stricken in years, and wore a black velvet cap and cloth shoes. He was of a staid, wealthy, and dissatisfied aspect. In his hand he conducted to church a mysterious child: a child of the feminine gender. The child had a beaver hat, with a stiff drab plume that surely never belonged to any bird of the air. The child was further attired in a nankeen frock and spencer, brown boxing gloves, and a veil. It had a blemish, in the nature of currant jelly, on its chin; and was a thirsty child. Inasmuch that the personage carried in his pocket a green bottle, from which, when the first psalm was given out, the child was openly refreshed. At all other times throughout the service it was motionless, and stood on the seat of the large pew, closely fitted into the corner, like a rain-water pipe.

The personage never opened his book, and never looked at the clergyman. *He* never sat down either, but stood with his arms leaning on the top of the pew, and his forehead sometimes shaded with his right hand, always looking at the church-door. It was a long church for a church of its size, and he was at the upper end, but he always looked at the door. That he was an old book-keeper, or an old trader who had kept his own books, and that he might be seen

at the Bank of England about Dividend times, no doubt. That he had lived in the City all his life, and was disdainful of other localities, no doubt. Why he looked at the door I never absolutely proved, but it is my belief that he lived in expectation of the time when the citizens would come back to live in the City, and its ancient glories would be renewed. He appeared to expect that this would occur on a Sunday, and that the wanderers would first appear in the deserted churches, penitent and humbled. Hence, he looked at the door which they never darkened. Whose child the child was, whether the child of a disinherited daughter, or some parish orphan whom the personage had adopted, there was nothing to lead up to. It never played, or skipped, or smiled. Once the idea occurred to me that it was an automaton, and that the personage had made it; but, following the strange couple out one Sunday, I heard the personage say to it, "Thirteen thousand pounds;" to which it added, in a weak human voice, "Seventeen and fourpence." Four Sundays I followed them out, and this is all I ever heard or saw them say. One Sunday I followed them home. They lived behind a pump, and the personage opened their abode with an exceeding large key. The one solitary inscription on their house related to a fire-plug. The house was partly undermined by a deserted and closed gateway; its windows were blind with dirt; and it stood with its face disconsolately turned to a wall. Five great churches and two small ones rang their Sunday bells between this house and the church the couple frequented, so they must have had some special reason for going a quarter of a mile to it. The last time I saw them was on this wise. I had been to explore another church at a distance, and happened to pass the church they frequented, at about two of the afternoon, when that edifice was closed. But, a little side-door, which I had never observed before, stood open, and disclosed certain cellarous steps. Methought, "They are airing the vaults to-day," when the personage and the child silently arrived at the steps, and silently descended. Of course, I came to the conclusion that the personage had at last despaired of the looked-for return of the penitent citizens, and that he and the child went down to get themselves buried.

In the course of my pilgrimages I came upon one obscure church which had broken out in the melodramatic style, and was got up with various tawdry decorations, much after the manner of the extinct London maypoles. These attractions had induced several young priests or

deacons in black bibs for waistcoats, and several young ladies interested in that noble order (the proportion being, as I estimated, seventeen young ladies to a deacon), to come into the City as a new and odd excitement. It was wonderful to see how these young people played out their little play in the heart of the City, all among themselves, without the deserted City's knowing anything about it. It was as if you should take an empty counting-house on a Sunday, and act one of the old Mysteries there. They had impressed a small school (from what neighbourhood I don't know) to assist in the performances, and it was pleasant to notice frantic garlands of inscription on the walls, especially addressing those poor innocents in characters impossible for them to decipher. There was a remarkably agreeable smell of pomatum in this congregation.

But, in other cases, rot and mildew and dead citizens formed the uppermost scent, while, infused into it, in a dreamy way not at all displeasing, was the staple character of the neighbourhood. In the churches about Mark Lane, for example, there was a dry whiff of wheat; and I accidentally struck an airy sample of barley out of an aged hassock in one of them. From Rood Lane to Tower Street, and thereabouts, there was often a subtle flavour of wine: sometimes of tea. One church near Mincing Lane smelt like a druggist's drawer. Behind the Monument the service had a flavour of damaged oranges, which, a little further down towards the river, tempered into herrings, and gradually toned into a cosmopolitan blast of fish. In one church, the exact counterpart of the church in the Rake's Progress where the hero is being married to the horrible old lady, there was no speciality of atmosphere until the organ shook a perfume of hides all over us from some adjacent warehouse.

Be the scent what it would, however, there was no speciality in the people. There were never enough of them to represent any calling or neighbourhood. They had all gone elsewhere overnight, and the few stragglers in the many churches languished there inexpressibly.

Among the uncommercial travels in which I have engaged, this year of Sunday travel occupies its own place, apart from all the rest. Whether I think of the church where the sails of the oyster boats in the river almost flapped against the windows, or of the church where the railroad made the bells hum as the train rushed by above the roof, I recall a curious experience. On summer Sundays, in the gentle rain or the bright sunshine—either, deepening the idleness

of the idle City—I have sat, in that singular silence which belongs to resting-places usually aspid, in scores of buildings at the heart of the world's metropolis, unknown to far greater numbers of people speaking the English tongue than the ancient edifices of the Eternal City, or the Pyramids of Egypt. The dark vestries and registries into which I have peeped, and the little hemmed-in churchyards that have echoed to my feet, have left impressions on my memory as distinct and quaint as any it has in that way received. In all those dusty registers that the worms are eating, there is not a line but made some hearts leap, or some tears flow, in their day. Still and dry now, still and dry! and the old tree at the window, with no room for its branches, has seen them all out. So with the tomb of the old Master of the old Company, on which it drips. His son restored it and died, his daughter restored it and died, and then he had been remembered long enough, and the tree took possession of him, and his name cracked out.

There are few more striking indications of the changes of manners and customs that two or three hundred years have brought about than these deserted churches. Many of them are handsome and costly structures, several of them were designed by WREN, many of them arose from the ashes of the great fire, others of them outlived the plague and the fire too, to die a slow death in these later days. No one can be sure of the coming time; but it is not too much to say of it that it has no sign, in its unsettling tides, of the reflux to these churches of their congregations and uses. They remain, like the tombs of the old citizens who lie beneath them and around them, Monuments of another age. They are worth a Sunday exploration, now and then, for they yet echo, not unharmoniously, to the time when the City of London really was London; when the 'Prentices and Trained Bands were of mark in the state; when even the Lord Mayor himself was a reality—not a Fiction conventionally be-puffed on one day in the year by illustrious friends, who no less conventionally laugh at him on the remaining three hundred and sixty-four days.

X.

SHY NEIGHBOURHOODS.

SO much of my travelling is done on foot, that if I cherished betting propensities, I should probably be found registered

in sporting newspapers under some such title as the Elastic Novice, challenging all eleven-stone mankind to competition in walking. My last special feat was turning out of bed at two, after a hard day, pedestrian and otherwise, and walking thirty miles into the country to breakfast. The road was so lonely in the night, that I fell asleep to the monotonous sound of my own feet, doing their regular four miles an hour. Mile after mile I walked without the slightest sense of exertion, dozing heavily and dreaming constantly. It was only when I made a stumble like a drunken man, or struck out into the road to avoid a horseman close upon me on the path—who had no existence—that I came to myself and looked about. The day broke mistily (it was autumn-time), and I could not disembarrass myself of the idea that I had to climb those heights and banks of clouds, and that there was an Alpine Convent somewhere behind the sun, where I was going to breakfast. This sleepy notion was so much stronger than such substantial objects as villages and haystacks, that, after the sun was up and bright, and when I was sufficiently awake to have a sense of pleasure in the prospect, I still occasionally caught myself looking about for wooden arms to point the right track up the mountain, and wondering there was no snow yet. It is a curiosity of broken sleep, that I made immense quantities of verses on that pedestrian occasion (of course I never make any when I am in my right senses), and that I spoke a certain language once pretty familiar to me, but which I have nearly forgotten from disuse, with fluency. Of both these phenomena I have such frequent experience in the state between sleeping and waking, that I sometimes argue with myself that I know I cannot be awake, for, if I were, I should not be half so ready. The readiness is not imaginary, because I often recall long strings of the verses, and many turns of the fluent speech, after I am broad awake.

My walking is of two kinds: one, straight on end to a definite goal at a round pace; one, objectless, loitering, and purely vagabond. In the latter state no gipsy on earth is a greater vagabond than myself; it is so natural to me, and strong with me, that I think I must be the descendant, at no great distance, of some irclaimable tramp.

One of the pleasantest things I have lately met with, in a vagabond course of shy metropolitan neighbourhoods and small shops, is the fancy of a humble artist, as exemplified in two portraits representing Mr. Thomas Sayers, of Great Britain, and Mr. John Heenan, of the United States

of America. These illustrious men are highly coloured in fighting trim, and fighting attitude. To suggest the pastoral and meditative nature of their peaceful calling, Mr. Heenan is represented on emerald sward, with primroses and other modest flowers springing up under the heels of his half-boots; while Mr. Sayers is impelled to the administration of his favourite blow, the Auctioneer, by the silent eloquence of a village church. The humble homes of England, with their domestic virtues and honeysuckle porches, urge both heroes to go in and win; and the lark and other singing birds are observable in the upper air, ecstatically carolling their thanks to Heaven for a fight. On the whole, the associations entwined with the pugilistic art by this artist are much in the manner of Izaak Walton.

But, it is with the lower animals of backstreets and by-ways that my present purpose rests. For human notes we may return to such neighbourhoods when leisure and opportunity serve.

Nothing in shy neighbourhoods perplexes my mind more than the bad company birds keep. Foreign birds often get into good society, but British birds are inseparable from low associates. There is a whole street of them in St. Giles's; and I always find them in poor and immoral neighbourhoods, convenient to the public-house and the pawnbroker's. They seem to lead people into drinking, and even the man who makes their cages usually gets into a chronic state of black eye. Why is this? Also, they will do things for people in short-skirted velvet coats with bone buttons, or in sleeved waistcoats and fur caps, which they cannot be persuaded by the respectable orders of society to undertake. In a dirty court in Spitalfields, once, I found a goldfinch drawing his own water, and drawing as much of it as if he were in a consuming fever. That goldfinch lived at a bird shop, and offered, in writing, to barter himself against old clothes, empty bottles, or even kitchen-stuff. Surely a low thing and a depraved taste in any finch! I bought that goldfinch for money. He was sent home, and hung upon a nail over against my table. He lived outside a counterfeit dwelling-house, supposed (as I argued) to be a dyer's; otherwise it would have been impossible to account for his perch sticking out of the garret window. From the time of his appearance in my room, either he left off being thirsty—which was not in the bond—or he could not make up his mind to hear his little bucket drop back into his well when he let it go: a shock which in the best of times had

made him tremble. He drew no water but by stealth, and under the cloak of night. After an interval of futile and at length hopeless expectation, the merchant who had educated him was appealed to. The merchant was a bow-legged character, with a flat and cushiony nose, like the last new strawberry. He wore a fur cap, and shorts, and was of the velvetene race, velvetene. He sent word that he would "look round." He looked round, appeared in the doorway of the room, and slightly cocked up his evil eye at the goldfinch. Instantly a raging thirst beset that bird; when it was appeased, he still drew several unnecessary buckets of water; and finally leaped about his perch and sharpened his bill, as if he had been to the nearest wine vaults and got drunk.

Donkeys, again. I know shy neighbourhoods where the donkey goes in at the street-door, and appears to live up-stairs, for I have examined the back-yard from over the palings, and have been unable to make him out. Gentility, nobility, Royalty, would appeal to that donkey in vain to do what he does for the costermonger. Feed him with oats at the highest price, put an infant prince and princess in a pair of panniers on his back, adjust his delicate trappings to a nicety, take him to the softest slopes at Windsor, and try what pace you can get out of him. Then, starve him, harness him anyhow to a truck with a flat tray on it, and see him bowl from Whitechapel to Bayswater. There appears to be no particular private understanding between birds and donkeys in a state of nature; but, in the shy neighbourhood state, you shall see them always in the same hands, and always developing their very best energies for the very worst company. I have known a donkey—by sight; we were not on speaking terms—who lived over on the Surrey side of London Bridge, among the fastnesses of Jacob's Island and Dockhead. It was the habit of that animal, when his services were not in immediate requisition, to go out alone, idling. I have met him a mile from his place of residence, loitering about the streets; and the expression of his countenance at such times was most degraded. He was attached to the establishment of an elderly lady who sold periwinkles, and he used to stand on Saturday nights with a cartful of those delicacies outside a gin-shop, pricking up his ears when a customer came to the cart, and too evidently deriving satisfaction from the knowledge that they got bad measure. His mistress was sometimes overtaken by inebriety. The last time I ever saw him (about five years ago) he was in circumstances of difficulty, caused

by this failing. Having been left alone with the cart of periwinkles, and forgotten, he went off idling. He prowled among his usual low haunts for some time, gratifying his depraved tastes, until, not taking the cart into his calculations, he endeavoured to turn up a narrow alley, and became greatly involved. He was taken into custody by the police, and the Green Yard of the district being near at hand, was backed into that place of durance. At that crisis I encountered him; the stubborn sense he evinced of being—not to compromise the expression—a blackguard, I never saw exceeded in the human subject. A flaring candle in a paper shade, stuck in among his periwinkles, showed him, with his ragged harness broken and his cart extensively shattered, twitching his mouth and shaking his hanging head, a picture of disgrace and obduracy. I have seen boys being taken to station-houses, who were as like him as his own brother.

The dogs of shy neighbourhoods I observe to avoid play, and to be conscious of poverty. They avoid work too, if they can, of course; that is in the nature of all animals. I have the pleasure to know a dog in a back-street in the neighbourhood of Walworth, who has greatly distinguished himself in the minor drama, and who takes his portrait with him when he makes an engagement, for the illustration of the play-bill. His portrait (which is not at all like him) represents him in the act of dragging to the earth a recreant Indian, who is supposed to have tomahawked, or essayed to tomahawk, a British officer. The design is pure poetry, for there is no such Indian in the piece, and no such incident. He is a dog of the Newfoundland breed, for whose honesty I would be bail to any amount; but whose intellectual qualities in association with dramatic fiction I cannot rate high. Indeed, he is too honest for the profession he has entered. Being at a town in Yorkshire last summer, and seeing him posted in the bill of the night, I attended the performance. His first scene was eminently successful; but, as it occupied a second in its representation (and five lines in the bill), it scarcely afforded ground for a cool and deliberate judgment of his powers. He had merely to bark, run on, and jump through an inn window after a comic fugitive. The next scene of importance to the fable was a little marred in its interest by his over-anxiety; forasmuch as while his master (a belated soldier in a den of robbers on a tempestuous night) was feelingly lamenting the absence of his faithful dog, and laying great stress on the fact that he was thirty leagues away, the faithful dog was

barking furiously in the prompter's box, and clearly choking himself against his collar. But it was in his greatest scene of all that his honesty got the better of him. He had to enter a dense and trackless forest, on the trail of the murderer, and there to fly at the murderer when he found him resting at the foot of a tree, with his victim bound ready for slaughter. It was a hot night, and he came into the forest from an altogether unexpected direction, in the sweetest temper, at a very deliberate trot, not in the least excited; trotted to the foot-lights with his tongue out; and there sat down, panting, and amiably surveying the audience, with his tail beating on the boards like a Dutch clock. Meanwhile, the murderer, impatient to receive his doom, was audibly calling to him "Co-o-ome here!" while the victim, struggling with his bonds, assailed him with the most injurious expressions. It happened, through these means, that when he was in course of time persuaded to trot up and rend the murderer limb from limb, he made it (for dramatic purposes) a little too obvious that he worked out that awful retribution by licking butter off his blood-stained hands.

In a shy street, behind Long Acre, two honest dogs live, who perform in Punch's shows. I may venture to say that I am on terms of intimacy with both, and that I never saw either guilty of the falsehood of failing to look down at the man inside the show during the whole performance. The difficulty other dogs have in satisfying their minds about these dogs appears to be never overcome by time. The same dogs must encounter them over and over again, as they trudge along in their off-minutes behind the legs of the show and beside the drum; but all dogs seem to suspect their frills and jackets, and to sniff at them as if they thought those articles of personal adornment an eruption—a something in the nature of mange, perhaps. From this Covent Garden of mine I noticed a country dog, only the other day, who had come up to Covent Garden Market under a cart, and had broken his cord, an end of which he still trailed along with him. He loitered about the corners of the four streets commanded by my window; and bad London dogs came up, and told him lies that he didn't believe; and worse London dogs came up, and made proposals to him to go and steal in the market, which his principles rejected; and the ways of the town confused him, and he crept aside and lay down in a doorway. He had scarcely got a wink of sleep, when up comes Punch with Toby. He was darting to Toby for consolation and advice, when he saw the frill; and stopped, in the middle of the street, appalled

The show was pitched, Toby retired behind the drapery, the audience formed, the drum and pipes struck up. . . My country dog remained immovable, intently staring at these strange appearances, until Toby opened the drama by appearing on his ledge, and to him entered Punch, who put a tobacco-pipe into Toby's mouth. At this spectacle the country dog threw up his head, gave one terrible howl, and fled due west.

We talk of men keeping dogs, but we might often talk more expressively of dogs keeping

men. I know a bulldog in a shy corner of Hammersmith who keeps a man. He keeps him up a yard, and makes him go to public-houses and lay wagers on him, and obliges him to lean against posts and look at him, and forces him to neglect work for him, and keeps him under rigid coercion. I once knew a fancy terrier who kept a gentleman—a gentleman who had been brought up at Oxford, too. The dog kept the gentleman entirely for his glorification, and the gentleman never talked about anything but the terrier. This, however, was not in a



"HE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY BY THE POLICE."

shy neighbourhood, and is a digression consequently.

There are a great many dogs in shy neighbourhoods who keep boys. I have my eye on a mongrel in Somers Town who keeps three boys. He feigns that he can bring down sparrows, and unburrow rats (he can do neither), and he takes the boys out on sporting pretences into all sorts of suburban fields. He has like wise made them believe that he possesses some

mysterious knowledge of the art of fishing, and they consider themselves incompletely equipped for the Hampstead ponds, with a pickle-jar and a wide-mouthed bottle, unless he is with them, and barking tremendously. There is a dog residing in the Borough of Southwark who keeps a blind man. He may be seen, most days, in Oxford Street, haling the blind man away on expeditions wholly un contemplated by, and unintelligible to, the man : wholly of the dog's con-

ception and execution. Contrariwise, when the man has projects, the dog will sit down in a crowded thoroughfare and meditate. I saw him yesterday wearing the money-tray like an easy collar, instead of offering it to the public, taking the man against his will, on the invitation of a disreputable cur, apparently to visit a dog at Harrow—he was so intent on that direction. The north wall of Burlington-House Gardens, between the Arcade and the Albany, offers a shy spot for appointment among blind men at about two or three o'clock in the afternoon. They sit (very uncomfortably) on a sloping stone there, and compare notes. Their dogs may always be observed, at the same time, openly disparaging the men they keep to one another, and settling where they shall respectively take their men when they begin to move again. At a small butcher's, in a shy neighbourhood (there is no reason for suppressing the name; it is by Notting Hill, and gives upon the district called the Pot-teries), I know a shaggy black and white dog who keeps a drover. He is a dog of an easy disposition, and too frequently allows this drover to get drunk. On these occasions, it is the dog's custom to sit outside the public-house, keeping his eye on a few sheep, and thinking. I have seen him with six sheep, plainly casting up in his mind how many he began with when he left the market, and at what places he has left the rest. I have seen him perplexed by not being able to account to himself for certain particular sheep. A light has gradually broken on him, he has remembered at what butcher's he left them, and in a burst of grave satisfaction has caught a fly off his nose, and shown himself much relieved. If I could at any time have doubted the fact that it was he who kept the drover, and not the drover who kept him, it would have been abundantly proved by his way of taking undivided charge of the six sheep, when the drover came out besmeared with red ochre and beer, and gave him wrong directions, which he calmly disregarded. He has taken the sheep entirely into his own hands, has merely remarked, with respectful firmness, "That instruction would place them under an omnibus; you had better confine your attention to yourself—you will want it all;" and has driven his charge away, with an intelligence of ears and tail, and a knowledge of business, that has left his lout of a man very, very far behind.

As the dogs of shy neighbourhoods usually betray a slinking consciousness of being in poor circumstances—for the most part manifested in an aspect of anxiety, an awkwardness in their play, and a misgiving that somebody is going to

harness them to something, to pick up a living—so the cats of shy neighbourhoods exhibit a strong tendency to relapse into barbarism. Not only are they made selfishly ferocious by ruminating on the surplus population around them, and on the densely-crowded state of all the avenues to cat's-meat; not only is there a moral and politico-economical haggardness in them, traceable to these reflections; but they evince a physical deterioration. Their linen is not clean, and is wretchedly got up; their black turns rusty, like old mourning; they wear very indifferent fur; and take to the shabbiest cotton velvet, instead of silk velvet. I am on terms of recognition with several small streets of cats about the Obelisk in St. George's Fields, and also in the vicinity of Clerkenwell Green, and also in the back-settlements of Drury Lane. In appearance they are very like the women among whom they live. They seem to turn out of their unwholesome beds into the street without any preparation. They leave their young families to stagger about the gutters unassisted, while they frouzily quarrel and swear and scratch and spit at street corners. In particular, I remark that when they are about to increase their families (an event of frequent occurrence), the resemblance is strongly expressed in a certain dusty dowdiness, down-at-heel self-neglect, and general giving up of things. I cannot honestly report that I have ever seen a feline matron of this class washing her face when in an interesting condition.

Not to prolong these notes of uncommercial travel among the lower animals of shy neighbourhoods by dwelling at length upon the exasperated moodiness of the tom-cats, and their resemblance in many respects to a man and a brother, I will come to a close with a word on the fowls of the same localities.

That anything born of an egg, and invested with wings, should have got to the pass that it hops contentedly down a ladder into a cellar, and calls *that* going home, is a circumstance so amazing as to leave one nothing more in this connection to wonder at. Otherwise I might wonder at the completeness with which these fowls have become separated from all the birds of the air—have taken to grovelling in bricks and mortar and mud—have forgotten all about live trees, and make roosting-places of shop-boards, barrows, oyster tubs, bulk-heads, and door-scrappers. I wonder at nothing concerning them, and take them as they are. I accept as products of Nature and things of course a reduced Bantam family of my acquaintance in the Hackney Road, who are incessantly at the pawn-

broker's. I cannot say that they enjoy themselves, for they are of a melancholy temperament; but what enjoyment they are capable of, they derive from crowding together in the pawnbroker's side-entry. Here they are always to be found in a feeble flutter, as if they were newly come down in the world, and were afraid of being identified. I know a low fellow, originally of a good family from Dorking, who takes his whole establishment of wives, in single file, in at the door of the Jug Department of a disorderly tavern near the Haymarket, manœuvres them among the company's legs, emerges with them at the Bottle Entrance, and so passes his life: seldom, in the season, going to bed before two in the morning. Over Waterloo Bridge there is a shabby old speckled couple (they belong to the wooden French-bedstead, washing-stand, and towel-horse making trade), who are always trying to get in at the door of a chapel. Whether the old lady, under a delusion reminding one of Mrs. Southcott, has an idea of intrusting an egg to that particular denomination, or merely understands that she has no business in the building, and is consequently frantic to enter it, I cannot determine; but she is constantly endeavouring to undermine the principal door; while her partner, who is infirm upon his legs, walks up and down, encouraging her, and defying the Universe. But, the family I have been best acquainted with, since the removal from this trying sphere of a Chinese circle at Brentford, reside in the densest part of Bethnal Green. Their abstraction from the objects among which they live, or rather, their conviction that those objects have all come into existence in express subservience to fowls, has so enchanted me, that I have made them the subject of many journeys at divers hours. After careful observation of the two lords and the ten ladies of whom this family consists, I have come to the conclusion that their opinions are represented by the leading lord and leading lady: the latter, as I judge, an aged personage, afflicted with a paucity of feather and visibility of quill, that gives her the appearance of a bundle of office pens. When a railway goods van that would crush an elephant comes round the corner, tearing over these fowls, they emerge unharmed from under the horses, perfectly satisfied that the whole rush was a passing property in the air, which may have left something to eat behind it. They look upon old shoes, wrecks of kettles and saucepans, and fragments of bonnets as a kind of meteoric discharge for fowls to peck at. Pegtops and hoops they account, I think, as a sort of hail; shuttle-cocks, as rain, or dew. Gas-light comes quite

as natural to them as any other light; and I have more than a suspicion that, in the minds of the two lords, the early public-house at the corner has superseded the sun. I have established it as a certain fact that they always begin to crow when the public-house shutters begin to be taken down; and that they salute the potboy, the instant he appears to perform that duty, as if he were Phœbus in person.

XI.

TRAMPS.

THE chance use of the word "Tramp," in my last paper, brought that numerous fraternity so vividly before my mind's eye, that I had no sooner laid down my pen than a compulsion was upon me to take it up again, and make notes of the Tramps whom I perceived on all the summer roads in all directions.

Whenever a tramp sits down to rest by the wayside, he sits with his legs in a dry ditch; and whenever he goes to sleep (which is very often indeed), he goes to sleep on his back. Yonder, by the high-road, glaring white in the bright sunshine, lies, on the dusty bit of turf under the bramble-bush that fences the coppice from the highway, the tramp of the order savage, fast asleep. He lies on the broad of his back, with his face turned up to the sky, and one of his ragged arms loosely thrown across his face. His bundle (what can be the contents of that mysterious bundle, to make it worth his while to carry it about?) is thrown down beside him, and the waking woman with him sits with her legs in the ditch, and her back to the road. She wears her bonnet rakishly perched on the front of her head, to shade her face from the sun in walking, and she ties her skirts round her in conventionally tight tramp fashion with a sort of apron. You can seldom catch sight of her, resting thus, without seeing her in a despondently defiant manner doing something to her hair or her bonnet, and glancing at you between her fingers. She does not often go to sleep herself in the daytime, but will sit for any length of time beside the man. And his slumberous propensities would not seem to be referable to the fatigue of carrying the bundle, for she carries it much oftener and further than he. When they are afoot, you will mostly find him slouching on ahead in a gruff temper, while she lags heavily

behind with the burden. He is given to personally correcting her, too—which phase of his character develops itself oftener on benches outside alehouse doors—and she appears to become strongly attached to him for these reasons; it may usually be noticed that, when the poor creature has a bruised face, she is the most affectionate. He has no occupation whatever, this order of tramp, and has no object whatever in going anywhere. He will sometimes call himself a brickmaker, or a sawyer, but only when he takes an imaginative flight. He generally represents himself, in a vague way, as looking out for a job of work; but he never did work, he never does, and he never will. It is a favourite fiction with him, however (as if he were the most industrious character on earth), that *you* never work; and, as he goes past your garden and sees you looking at your flowers, you will overhear him growl, with a strong sense of contrast, “*You* are a lucky hidle devil, *you* are!”

The slinking tramp is of the same hopeless order, and has the same injured conviction on him that you were born to whatever you possess, and never did anything to get it; but he is of a less audacious disposition. He will stop before your gate, and say to his female companion, with an air of constitutional humility and propitiation—to edify any one who may be within hearing behind a blind or a bush—“This is a sweet spot, ain’t it? A lovely spot! And I wonder if they’d give two poor footsore travellers like me and you a drop of fresh water out of such a pretty gen-teel crib? We’d take it very koind on ’em, wouldn’t us? Wery koind, upon my word, us would!” He has a quick sense of a dog in the vicinity, and will extend his modestly-injured propitiation to the dog chained up in your yard; remarking, as he slinks at the yard-gate, “Ah! *You* are a foine breed o’ dog, too, and *you* ain’t kep for nothink! I’d take it wery koind o’ your master if he’d elp a traveller and his woife, as envies no gentlefolk their good fortun, wi’ a bit o’ your broken wittles. He’d never know the want of it, nor more would you. Don’t bark like that at poor persons as never done you no arm; the poor is down-trodden and broke enough without that. Oh, DON’T!” He generally heaves a prodigious sigh in moving away, and always looks up the lane and down the lane, and up the road and down the road, before going on.

Both of these orders of tramp are of a very robust habit; let the hard-working labourer, at whose cottage door they prowl and beg, have the ague never so badly, these tramps are sure to be in good health.

There is another kind of tramp whom you encounter this bright summer day—say, on a road with the sea breeze making its dust lively, and sails of ships in the blue distance beyond the slope of down. As you walk enjoyingly on, you descry in the perspective, at the bottom of a steep hill up which your way lies, a figure that appears to be sitting airily on a gate, whistling in a cheerful and disengaged manner. As you approach nearer to it, you observe the figure to slide down from the gate, to desist from whistling, to uncock its hat, to become tender of foot, to depress its head and elevate its shoulders, and to present all the characteristics of profound despondency. Arriving at the bottom of the hill, and coming close to the figure, you observe it to be the figure of a shabby young man. He is moving painfully forward, in the direction in which you are going, and his mind is so preoccupied with his misfortunes that he is not aware of your approach until you are close upon him at the hill-foot. When he is aware of you, you discover him to be a remarkably well-behaved young man, and a remarkably well-spoken young man. You know him to be well behaved by his respectful manner of touching his hat: you know him to be well spoken by his smooth manner of expressing himself. He says, in a flowing confidential voice, and without punctuation, “I ask your pardon sir but if you would excuse the liberty of being so addressed upon the public Iway by one who is almost reduced to rags though it as nat always been so and by no fault of his own but through ill elth in his family and many unmerited sufferings it would be a great obligation sir to know the time.” You give the well-spoken young man the time. The well-spoken young man, keeping well up with you, resumes: “I am aware sir that it is a liberty to intrude a further question on a gentleman walking for his entertainment but might I make so bold as ask the favour of the way to Dover sir and about the distance?” You inform the well-spoken young man that the way to Dover is straight on, and the distance some eighteen miles. The well-spoken young man becomes greatly agitated. “In the condition to which I am reduced,” says he, “I could not ope to reach Dover before dark even if my shoes were in a state to take me there or my feet were in a state to old out over the flinty road and were not on the bare ground of which any gentleman has the means to satisfy himself by looking Sir may I take the liberty of speaking to you?” As the well-spoken young man keeps so well up with you that you can’t prevent his taking the liberty of speaking to

you, he goes on, with fluency: "Sir it is not begging that is my intention for I was brought up by the best of mothers and begging is not my trade I should not know sir how to follow it as a trade if such were my shameful wishes for the best of mothers long taught otherwise and in the best of omes though now reduced to take the present liberty on the Iway Sir my business was the law-stationering and I was favourably known to the Solicitor-General the Attorney-General the majority of the Judges and the ole of the legal profession but through ill elth in my family and the treachery of a friend for whom I became security and he no other than my own wife's brother the brother of my own wife I was cast forth with my tender partner and three young children not to beg for I will sooner die of deprivation but to make my way to the seaport town of Dover where I have a relative i in respect not only that will assist me but that would trust me with untold gold Sir in appier times and hare this calamity fell upon me I made for my amusement when I little thought that I should ever need it excepting for my air this"—here the well-spoken young man put his hand into his breast—"this comb! Sir I implore you in the name of charity to purchase a tortoise-shell comb which is a genuine article at any price that your humanity may put upon it and may the blessings of a ouselless family awaiting with beating arts the return of a husband and a father from Dover upon the cold stone seats of London Bridge ever attend you Sir may I take the liberty of speaking to you I implore you to buy this comb!" By this time, being a reasonably good walker, you will have been too much for the well-spoken young man, who will stop short, and express his disgust and his want of breath in a long expectoration, as you leave him behind.

Towards the end of the same walk, on the same bright summer day, at the corner of the next little town or village, you may find another kind of tramp, embodied in the persons of a most exemplary couple, whose only improvidence appears to have been that they spent the last of their little All on soap. They are a man and woman, spotless to behold—John Anderson, with the frost on his short smock-frock instead of his "pow," attended by Mrs. Anderson. John is over-ostentatious of the frost upon his raiment, and wears a curious, and, you would say, an almost unnecessary demonstration of girdle of white linen wound about his waist—a girdle snowy as Mrs. Anderson's apron. This cleanliness was the expiring effort of the respectable couple, and nothing then remained to Mr. An-

derson but to get chalked upon his spade, in snow-white copy-book characters, HUNGRY! and to sit down here. Yes; one thing more remained to Mr. Anderson—his character; Monarchs could not deprive him of his hard-earned character. Accordingly, as you come up with this spectacle of virtue in distress, Mrs. Anderson rises, and with a decent curtsy presents for your consideration a certificate from a Doctor of Divinity, the Reverend the Vicar of Upper Dodginton, who informs his Christian friends and all whom it may concern that the bearers, John Anderson and lawful wife, are persons to whom you cannot be too liberal. This benevolent pastor omitted no work of his hands to fit the good couple out, for with half an eye you can recognise his autograph on the spade.

Another class of tramp is a man, the most valuable part of whose stock-in-trade is a highly-perplexed demeanour. He is got up like a countryman, and you will often come upon the poor fellow while he is endeavouring to decipher the inscription on a milestone—quite a fruitless endeavour, for he cannot read. He asks your pardon, he truly does (he is very slow of speech, this tramp, and he looks in a bewildered way all round the prospect while he talks to you), but all of us shold do as we wold be done by, and he'll take it kind if you'll put a power man in the right road fur to jine his eldest son as has broke his leg bad in the masoning, and is in this heere Orspit'l, as is wrote down by Squire Pouncerbys own hand as wold not tell a lie fur no man. He then produces from under his dark frock (being always very slow and perplexed) a neat but worn old leathern purse, from which he takes a scrap of paper. On this scrap of paper is written, by Squire Pouncerbys, of The Grove, "Please to direct the Bearer, a poor but very worthy man, to the Sussex County Hospital, near Brighton"—a matter of some difficulty at the moment, seeing that the request comes suddenly upon you in the depths of Hertfordshire. The more you endeavour to indicate where Brighton is—when you have with the greatest difficulty remembered—the less the devoted father can be made to comprehend, and the more obtusely he stares at the prospect; whereby, being reduced to extremity, you recommend the faithful parent to begin by going to St. Albans, and present him with half-a-crown. It does him good, no doubt, but scarcely helps him forward, since you find him lying drunk that same evening in the wheelwright's saw-pit, under the shed where the felled trees are, opposite the sign of the Three Jolly Hedgers.

But the most vicious, by far, of all the iddle

tramps, is the tramp who pretends to have been a gentleman. "Educated," he writes from the village beer-shop in pale ink of a ferruginous complexion; "educated at Trin. Coll. Cam.—nursed in the lap of affluence—once in my small way the patron of the Muses," &c. &c. &c.—surely a sympathetic mind will not withhold a trifle to help him on to the market-town where he thinks of giving a Lecture to the *fruges consumere nati*, on things in general? This shameful creature, lolling about hedge tap-rooms in his ragged clothes, now so far from being black that they look as if they never can have been black, is more selfish and insolent than even the savage tramp. He would sponge on the poorest boy for a farthing, and spurn him when he had got it; he would interpose (if he could get anything by it) between the baby and the mother's breast. So much lower than the company he keeps for his maudlin assumption of being higher, this pitiless rascal blights the summer roads as he maunders on between the luxuriant hedges: where (to my thinking) even the wild convolvulus and rose and sweetbrier are the worse for his going by, and need time to recover from the taint of him in the air.

The young fellows who trudge along barefoot, five or six together, their boots slung over their shoulders, their shabby bundles under their arms, their sticks newly cut from some roadside wood, are not eminently prepossessing, but are much less objectionable. There is a tramp-fellowship among them. They pick one another up at resting stations, and go on in companies. They always go at a fast swing—though they generally limp too—and there is invariably one of the company who has much ado to keep up with the rest. They generally talk about horses, and any other means of locomotion than walking: or, one of the company relates some recent experiences of the road—which are always disputes and difficulties. As for example. "So, as I'm a standing at the pump in the market, blest if there don't come up a Beadle, and he ses, 'Mustn't stand here,' he ses. 'Why not?' I ses. 'No beggars allowed in this town,' he ses. 'Who's a beggar?' I ses. 'You are,' he ses. 'Who ever see *me* beg? Did you?' I ses. 'Then you're a tramp,' he ses. 'I'd rather be that than a Beadle,' I ses." (The company expressed great approval.) "'Would you?' he ses to me. 'Yes, I would,' I ses to him. 'Well,' he ses, 'anyhow, get out of this town.' 'Why, blow your little town!' I ses, 'who wants to be in it? Wot does your dirty little town mean by comin' and stickin' itself in the road to anywhere? Why don't you get a shovel and a barrer, and clear

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your town out o' people's way?' " (The company expressing the highest approval, and laughing aloud, they all go down the hill.)

Then, there are the tramp handicraft men. Are they not all over England in this midsummer-time? Where does the lark sing, the corn grow, the mill turn, the river run, and they are not among the lights and shadows, tinkering, chair-mending, umbrella-mending, clock-mending, knife-grinding? Surely a pleasant thing, if we were in that condition of life, to grind our way through Kent, Sussex, and Surrey. For the first six weeks or so, we should see the sparks we ground off fiery bright against a background of green wheat and green leaves. A little later, and the ripe harvest would pale our sparks from red to yellow, until we got the dark newly-turned land for a background again, and they were red once more. By that time we should have ground our way to the sea cliffs, and the whirr of our wheel would be lost in the breaking of the waves. Our next variety in sparks would be derived from contrast with the gorgeous medley of colours in the autumn woods, and by the time we had ground our way round to the heathy lands between Reigate and Croydon, doing a prosperous stroke of business all along, we should show like a little firework in the light frosty air, and be the next best thing to the blacksmith's forge. Very agreeable, too, to go on a chair-mending tour. What judges we should be of rushes, and how knowingly (with a sheaf and a bottomless chair at our back) we should lounge on bridges, looking over at osier-beds! Among all the innumerable occupations that cannot possibly be transacted without the assistance of lookers-on, chair-mending may take a station in the first rank. When we sat down with our backs against the barn or the public-house, and began to mend, what a sense of popularity would grow upon us! When all the children came to look at us, and the tailor, and the general dealer, and the farmer who had been giving a small order at the little saddler's, and the groom from the great house, and the publican, and even the two skittle-players (and here note that, howsoever busy all the rest of village humankind may be, there will always be two people with leisure to play at skittles, wherever village skittles are), what encouragement would be on us to plait and weave! No one looks at us while we plait and weave these words. Clock-mending, again. Except for the slight inconvenience of carrying a clock under our arm, and the monotony of making the bell go whenever we came to a human habitation, what a pleasant privilege to give a voice to the dumb cottage clock, and set it talk-

ing to the cottage family again! Likewise, we foresee great interest in going round by the park plantations, under the overhanging boughs (hares, rabbits, partridges, and pheasants scudding like mad across and across the chequered ground before us), and so over the park ladder, and through the wood, until we came to the Keeper's lodge. Then would the Keeper be discoverable at his door, in a deep nest of leaves, smoking his pipe. Then, on our accosting him in the way of our trade, would he call to Mrs. Keeper respecting "t'ould clock" in the kitchen. Then would Mrs. Keeper ask us into the lodge, and, on due examination, we should offer to make a good job of it for eighteen-pence; which offer, being accepted, would set us tinkling and clinking among the chubby awe-struck little Keepers for an hour and more. So completely to the family's satisfaction would we achieve our work, that the Keeper would mention how that there was something wrong with the bell of the turret stable clock up at the Hall, and that, if we thought good of going up to the housekeeper on the chance of that job too, why he would take us. Then should we go, among the branching oaks and the deep fern, by silent ways of mystery known to the Keeper, seeing the herd glancing here and there as we went along, until we came to the old Hall, solemn and grand. Under the Terrace Flower Garden, and round by the stables, would the Keeper take us in, and as we passed we should observe how spacious and stately the stables, and how fine the painting of the horses' names over their stalls, and how solitary all: the family being in London. Then should we find ourselves presented to the housekeeper, sitting, in hushed state at needlework, in a bay-window looking out upon a mighty grim red-brick quadrangle, guarded by stone lions disrespectfully throwing sunmsets over the escutcheons of the noble family. Then, our services accepted, and we insinuated with a candle into the stable turret, we should find it to be a mere question of pendulum, but one that would hold us until dark. Then should we fall to work, with a general impression of Ghosts being about, and of pictures indoors that of a certainty came out of their frames and "walked," if the family would only own it. Then should we work and work, until the day gradually turned to dusk, and even until the dusk gradually turned to dark. Our task at length accomplished, we should be taken into an enormous servants' hall, and there regaled with beef and bread, and powerful ale. Then, paid freely, we should be at liberty to go, and should be told by a pointing helper to keep

round over yinder by the blasted ash, and so straight through the woods till we should see the town lights right afore us. Then, feeling lonesome, should we desire, upon the whole, that the ash had not been blasted, or that the helper had had the manners not to mention it. However, we should keep on all right, till suddenly the stable bell would strike ten in the dolefullest way, quite chilling our blood, though we had so lately taught him how to acquit himself. Then, as we went on, should we recall old stories, and dimly consider what it would be most advisable to do, in the event of a tall figure all in white, with saucer eyes, coming up and saying, "I want you to come to a churchyard and mend a church clock. Follow me!" Then should we make a burst to get clear of the trees, and should soon find ourselves in the open, with the town lights bright ahead of us. So should we lie that night at the ancient sign of the Crispin and Crispinus, and rise early next morning to be betimes on tramp again.

Bricklayers often tramp in twos and threes, lying by night at their "lodges," which are scattered all over the country. Bricklaying is another of the occupations that can by no means be transacted in rural parts without the assistance of spectators—of as many as can be convened. In thinly-peopled spots I have known bricklayers on tramp, coming up with bricklayers at work, to be so sensible of the indispensability of lookers-on, that they themselves have set up in that capacity, and have been unable to subside into the acceptance of a proffered share in the job for two or three days together. Sometimes the "navvy," on tramp, with an extra pair of half-boots over his shoulder, a bag, a bottle, and a can, will take a similar part in a job of excavation, and will look at it, without engaging in it, until all his money is gone. The current of my uncommercial pursuits caused me only last summer to want a little body of workmen for a certain spell of work in a pleasant part of the country; and I was at one time honoured with the attendance of as many as seven-and-twenty, who were looking at six.

Who can be familiar with any rustic highway in summer-time, without storing up knowledge of the many tramps who go from one oasis of town or village to another, to sell a stock-in-trade, apparently not worth a shilling when sold? Shrimps are a favourite commodity for this kind of speculation, and so are cakes of a soft and spongy character, coupled with Spanish nuts and brandy-balls. The stock is carried on the head in a basket, and between the head and the basket are the trestles on which the stock is

displayed at trading times. Fleet of foot, but a careworn class of tramp this, mostly; with a certain stiffness of neck, occasioned by much anxious balancing of baskets; and also with a long Chinese sort of eye, which an overweighted forehead would seem to have squeezed into that form.

On the hot dusty roads near seaport towns and great rivers, behold the tramping Soldier. And if you should happen never to have asked yourself whether his uniform is suited to his work, perhaps the poor fellow's appearance, as he comes distressfully towards you, with his absurdly tight jacket unbuttoned, his neck-gear in his hand, and his legs well chafed by his trousers of baize, may suggest the personal inquiry, how you think *you* would like it? Much better the tramping Sailor, although his cloth is somewhat too thick for land service. But, why the tramping merchant-mate should put on a black velvet waistcoat, for a chalky country in the dog-days, is one of the great secrets of nature that will never be discovered.

I have my eye upon a piece of Kentish road, bordered on either side by a wood, and having on one hand, between the road dust and the trees, a skirting patch of grass. Wild flowers grow in abundance on this spot, and it lies high and airy, with a distant river steadily stealing away to the ocean, like a man's life. To gain the milestone here, which the moss, primroses, violets, bluebells, and wild roses would soon render illegible but for peering travellers pushing them aside with their sticks, you must come up a steep hill, come which way you may. So, all the tramps with carts or caravans—the Gipsy Tramp, the Show Tramp, the Cheap Jack—find it impossible to resist the temptations of the place, and all turn the horse loose when they come to it, and boil the pot. Bless the place, I love the ashes of the vagabond fires that have scorched its grass! What tramp children do I see here, attired in a handful of rags, making a gymnasium of the shafts of the cart, making a feather bed of the flints and brambles, making a toy of the hobbled old horse who is not much more like a horse than any cheap toy would be! Here do I encounter the cart of mats and brooms and baskets—with all thoughts of business given to the evening wind—with the stew made and being served out—with Cheap Jack and Dear Gill striking soft music out of the plates that are rattled like warlike cymbals when put up for auction at fairs and markets—their minds so influenced (no doubt) by the melody of the nightingales, as they begin to sing in the

woods behind them, that if I were to propose to deal, they would sell me anything at cost price. On this hallowed ground has it been my happy privilege (let me whisper it) to behold the White-haired Lady with the pink eyes eating meat-pie with the Giant: while, by the hedge-side, on the box of blankets which I knew contained the snakes, were set forth the cups and saucers and the teapot. It was on an evening in August that I chanced upon this ravishing spectacle, and I noticed that, whereas the Giant reclined half concealed beneath the overhanging boughs, and seemed indifferent to Nature, the white hair of the gracious Lady streamed free in the breath of evening, and her pink eyes found pleasure in the landscape. I heard only a single sentence of her uttering, yet it bespoke a talent for modest repartee. The ill-mannered Giant—accused be his evil race!—had interrupted the lady in some remark, and, as I passed that enchanted corner of the wood, she gently reproved him with the words, "Now, Cobby;"—Cobby! so short a name!—"ain't one fool enough to talk at a time?"

Within appropriate distance of this magic ground, though not so near it as that the song trolled from tap or bench at door can invade its woodland silence, is a little hostelry which no man possessed of a penny was ever known to pass in warm weather. Before its entrance are certain pleasant trimmed limes; likewise a cool well, with so musical a bucket handle, that its fall upon the bucket rim will make a horse prick up his ears and neigh upon the droughty road half a mile off. This is a house of great resort for hay-making tramps and harvest tramps, inasmuch that as they sit within, drinking their mugs of beer, their relinquished scythes and reaping-hooks glare out of the open windows, as if the whole establishment were a family war-coach of Ancient Britons. Later in the season, the whole country-side, for miles and miles, will swarm with hopping tramps. They come in families, men, women, and children, every family provided with a bundle of bedding, an iron pot, a number of babies, and too often, with some poor sick creature quite unfit for the rough life, for whom they suppose the smell of the fresh hop to be a sovereign remedy. Many of these hoppers are Irish, but many come from London. They crowd all the roads, and camp under all the hedges and on all the scraps of common-land, and live among and upon the hops until they are all picked, and the hop gardens, so beautiful through the summer, look as if they had been laid waste by an invading army. Then there is a vast exodus of tramps

out of the country; and, if you ride or drive round any turn of any road at more than a foot-pace, you will be bewildered to find that you have charged into the bosom of fifty families, and that there are splashing up all around you,

in the utmost prodigality of confusion, bundles of bedding, babies, iron pots, and a good-humoured multitude of both sexes and all ages, equally divided between perspiration and intoxication.



"THEN YOU'RE A TRAMP," HE SES. "I'D RATHER BE THAT THAN A BEADLE," I SES.

XII.

DULLBOROUGH TOWN.

IT lately happened that I found myself rambling about the scenes among which my earliest days were passed: scenes from which I departed when I was a child, and which I did

not revisit until I was a man. This is no uncommon chance, but one that befalls some of us any day. Perhaps it may not be quite uninteresting to compare notes with the reader respecting an experience so familiar, and a journey so uncommercial.

I call my boyhood's home (and I feel like a Tenor in an English Opera when I mention it)

Dullborough. Most of us come from Dullborough who come from a country town.

As I left Dullborough in the days when there were no railroads in the land, I left it in a stage-coach. Through all the years that have since passed have I ever lost the smell of the damp straw in which I was packed—like game—and forwarded, carriage paid, to the Cross Keys, Wood Street, Cheapside, London? There was no other inside passenger, and I consumed my sandwiches in solitude and dreariness, and it rained hard all the way, and I thought life sloppier than I had expected to find it.

With this tender remembrance upon me, I was cavalierly shunted back into Dullborough the other day by train. My ticket had been previously collected, like my taxes, and my shining new portmanteau had had a great plaster stuck upon it, and I had been defied by Act of Parliament to offer an objection to anything that was done to it, or me, under a penalty of not less than forty shillings, or more than five pounds; compoundable for a term of imprisonment. When I had sent my disfigured property on to the hotel, I began to look about me; and the first discovery I made was, that the Station had swallowed up the playing-field.

It was gone. The two beautiful hawthorn-trees, the hedge, the turf, and all those butter-cups and daisies had given place to the stoniest of jolting roads; while, beyond the Station, an ugly dark monster of a tunnel kept its jaws open, as if it had swallowed them, and were ravenous for more destruction. The coach that had carried me away was melodiously called Timpson's Blue-Eyed Maid, and belonged to Timpson, at the coach-office up street; the locomotive engine that had brought me back was called severely No. 97, and belonged to S.E.R., and was spitting ashes and hot water over the blighted ground.

When I had been let out at the platform door, like a prisoner whom his turnkey grudgingly released, I looked in again, over the low wall, at the scene of departed glories. Here, in the hay-making time, had I been delivered from the dungeons of Seringatam, an immense pile (of haycock), by my countrymen, the victorious British (boy next door, and his two cousins), and had been recognised with ecstacy by my affianced one (Miss Green), who had come all the way from England (second house in the terrace) to ransom me, and marry me. Here had I first heard in confidence, from one whose father was greatly connected, being under Government, of the existence of a terrible banditti, called "The Radicals," whose principles were, that the Prince

Regent wore stays, and that nobody had a right to any salary, and that the army and navy ought to be put down—horrors at which I trembled in my bed, after supplicating that the Radicals might be speedily taken and hanged. Here, too, had we, the small boys of Boles's, had that cricket match against the small boys of Coles's; when Boles and Coles had actually met upon the ground, and when, instead of instantly hitting out at one another with the utmost fury, as we had all hoped and expected, those sneaks had said respectively, "I hope Mrs. Boles is well," and "I hope Mrs. Coles and the baby are doing charmingly." Could it be that, after all this, and much more, the playing-field was a Station, and No. 97 expectorated boiling water and red-hot cinders on it, and the whole belonged by Act of Parliament to S.E.R.?

As it could be, and was, I left the place with a heavy heart for a walk all over the town. And first of Timpson's up street. When I departed from Dullborough in the strawy arms of Timpson's Blue-Eyed Maid, Timpson's was a moderate-sized coach-office (in fact, a little coach-office), with an oval transparency in the window, which looked beautiful by night, representing one of Timpson's coaches in the act of passing a milestone on the London road with great velocity, completely full inside and out, and all the passengers dressed in the first style of fashion, and enjoying themselves tremendously. I found no such place as Timpson's now—no such bricks and rafters, not to mention the name—no such edifice on the teeming earth. Pickford had come and knocked Timpson's down. Pickford had not only knocked Timpson's down, but had knocked two or three houses down on each side of Timpson's, and then had knocked the whole into one great establishment with a pair of big gates, in and out of which his (Pickford's) wag-gons are, in these days, always rattling, with their drivers sitting up so high, that they look in at the second-floor windows of the old-fashioned houses in the High Street as they shake the town. I have not the honour of Pickford's acquaintance, but I felt that he had done me an injury, not to say committed an act of boyslaughter, in running over my childhood in this rough manner; and if ever I meet Pickford driving one of his own monsters, and smoking a pipe the while (which is the custom of his men), he shall know by the expression of my eye, if it catches his, that there is something wrong between us.

Moreover, I felt that Pickford had no right to come rushing into Dullborough, and deprive the town of a public picture. He is not Napoleon Bonaparte. When he took down the trans-

parent stage-coach, he ought to have given the town a transparent van. With a gloomy conviction that Pickford is wholly utilitarian and unimaginative, I proceeded on my way.

It is a mercy I have not a red and green lamp and a night bell at my door, for in my very young days I was taken to so many lyings-in, that I wonder I escaped becoming a professional martyr to them in after life. I suppose I had a very sympathetic nurse, with a large circle of married acquaintance. However that was, as I continued my walk through Dullborough, I found many houses to be solely associated in my mind with this particular interest. At one little greengrocer's shop, down certain steps from the street, I remember to have waited on a lady who had had four children (I am afraid to write five, though I fully believe it was five) at a birth. This meritorious woman held quite a reception in her room on the morning when I was introduced there, and the sight of the house brought vividly to my mind how the four (five) deceased young people lay, side by side, on a clean cloth on a chest of drawers; reminding me, by a homely association, which I suspect their complexion to have assisted, of pigs' feet as they are usually displayed at a neat tripe shop. Hot caudle was handed round on the occasion, and I further remembered, as I stood contemplating the greengrocer's, that a subscription was entered into among the company, which became extremely alarming to my consciousness of having pocket money on my person. This fact being known to my conductress, whoever she was, I was earnestly exhorted to contribute, but resolutely declined: therein disgusting the company, who gave me to understand that I must dismiss all expectations of going to Heaven.

How does it happen that, when all else is changed wherever one goes, there yet seem, in every place, to be some few people who never alter? As the sight of the greengrocer's house recalled these trivial incidents of long ago, the identical greengrocer appeared on the steps, with his hands in his pockets, and leaning his shoulder against the door-post, as my childish eyes had seen him many a time; indeed, there was his old mark on the door-post yet, as if his shadow had become a fixture there. It was he himself; he might formerly have been an old-looking young man, or he might now be a young-looking old man, but there he was. In walking along the street, I had as yet looked in vain for a familiar face, or even a transmitted face; here was the very greengrocer who had been weighing and handling baskets on the

morning of the reception. As he brought with him a dawning remembrance that he had had no proprietary interest in those babies, I crossed the road, and accosted him on the subject. He was not in the least excited or gratified, or in any way roused, by the accuracy of my recollection, but said, Yes, summut out of the common—he didn't remember how many it was (as if half-a-dozen babes either way made no difference)—had happened to a Mrs. What's-her-name, as' once lodged there—but he didn't call it to mind, particular. Nettled by this phlegmatic conduct, I informed him that I had left the town when I was a child. He slowly returned, quite unsoftened, and not without a sarcastic kind of complacency, *Had I?* Ah! And did' I find it had got on tolerably well without me? Such is the difference (I thought when I had left him a few hundred yards behind, and was by so much in a better temper) between going away from a place and remaining in it. I, had no right, I reflected, to be angry with the greengrocer for his want of interest; I was nothing to him: whereas he was the town, the cathedral, the bridge, the river, my childhood, and a large slice of my life, to me.

Of course the town had shrunk fearfully since I was a child there. I had entertained the impression: that the High Street was at least as wide as Regent Street, London, or the Italian Boulevard at Paris. I found it little better than a lane. There was a public clock in it, which I had supposed to be the finest clock in the world: whereas it now turned out to be as inexpressive, moon-faced, and weak a clock as ever I saw. It belonged to a Town-hall, where I had seen an Indian (who I now suppose wasn't an Indian) swallow a sword (which I now suppose he didn't). The edifice had appeared to me, in those days, so glorious a structure, that I had set it up in my mind as the model on which the Genie of the Lamp built the palace for Aladdin: A mean little brick heap, like a demented chapel, with a few yawning persons in leather gaiters, and in the last extremity for something to do, lounging at the door with their hands in their pockets, and calling themselves a Corn Exchange!

The Theatre was in existence, I found, on asking the fishmonger, who had a compact show of stock in his window, consisting of a sole and a quart of shrimps—and I resolved to comfort my mind by going to look at it. Richard the Third, in a very uncomfortable cloak, had first appeared to me there, and had made my heart leap with terror by backing up against the stage box in which I was posted, while struggling for

life against the virtuous Richmond. It was within those walls that I had learnt, as from a page of English history, how that wicked King slept in war-time on a sofa much too short for him, and how fearfully his conscience troubled his boots. Tifere, too, had I first seen the funny countryman, but countryman of noble principles, in a flowered waistcoat, crunch up his little hat and throw it on the ground, and pull off his coat, saying, "Dom thee, squire, coom on with thy fistes, then!" At which the lovely young woman who kept company with him (and who went out gleaning in a narrow white muslin apron, with five beautiful bars of five different-coloured ribbons across it) was so frightened for his sake, that she fainted away. Many wondrous secrets of Nature had I come to the knowledge of in that sanctuary: of which not the least terrific were, that the witches in Macbeth bore an awful resemblance to the Thanes and other proper inhabitants of Scotland; and that the good King Duncan couldn't rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it, and calling himself somebody else. To the Theatre, therefore, I repaired for consolation. But I found very little, for it was in a bad and declining way. A dealer in wine and bottled beer had already squeezed his trade into the box office, and the theatrical money was taken—when it came—in a kind of meat-safe in the passage. The dealer in wine and bottled beer must have insinuated himself under the stage too; for he announced that he had various descriptions of alcoholic drinks "in the wood," and there was no possible stowage for the wood anywhere else. Evidently, he was by degrees eating the establishment away to the core, and would soon have sole possession of it. It was To Let, and hopelessly so, for its old purposes, and there had been no entertainment within its walls for a long time except a Panorama; and even that had been announced as "pleasingly instructive," and I know too well the fatal meaning and the leaden import of those terrible expressions. No, there was no comfort in the Theatre. It was mysteriously gone, like my own youth. Unlike my own youth, it might be coming back some day; but there was little promise of it.

As the town was placarded with references to the Dullborough Mechanics' Institution, I thought I would go and look at that establishment next. There had been no such thing in the town in my young day, and it occurred to me that its extreme prosperity might have brought adversity upon the Drama. I found the Institution with some difficulty, and should scarcely have known that I had found it if I had

judged from its external appearance only; but this was attributable to its never having been finished, and having no front: consequently, it led a modest and retired existence up a stable-yard. It was (as I learnt on inquiry) a most flourishing Institution, and of the highest benefit to the town: two triumphs which I was glad to understand were not at all impaired by the seeming drawbacks that no mechanics belonged to it, and that it was steeped in debt to the chimney-pots. It had a large room, which was approached by an infirm step-ladder: the builder having declined to construct the intended staircase without a present payment in cash, which Dullborough (though profoundly appreciative of the Institution) seemed unaccountably bashful about subscribing. The large room had cost—or would, when paid for—five hundred pounds, and it had more mortar in it, and more echoes than one might have expected to get for the money. It was fitted up with a platform, and the usual lecturing tools, including a large black board of a menacing appearance. On referring to lists of the courses of lectures that had been given in this thriving Hall, I fancied I detected a shyness in admitting that human nature, when at leisure, has any desire whatever to be relieved and diverted; and a furtive sliding in of any poor make-weight piece of amusement shamefacedly and edgewise. Thus, I observed that it was necessary for the members to be knocked on the head with Gas, Air, Water, Food, the Solar System, the Geological periods, Criticism on Milton, the Steam-engine, John Bunyan, and Arrow-headed Inscriptions, before they might be tickled by those unaccountable choristers, the negro singers in the court costume of the reign of George the Second. Likewise, that they must be stunned by a weighty inquiry whether there was internal evidence in Shakespeare's works to prove that his uncle by the mother's side lived for some years at Stoke Newington, before they were brought to by a Miscellaneous Concert. But, indeed, the masking of entertainment, and pretending it was something else—as people mask bedsteads when they are obliged to have them in sitting-rooms, and make believe that they are bookcases, sofas, chests of drawers, anything rather than bedsteads—was manifest even in the pretence of dreariness that the unfortunate entertainers themselves felt obliged in decency to put forth when they came here. One very agreeable professional singer, who travelled with two professional ladies, knew better than to introduce either of those ladies to sing the ballad "Comin' through the Rye," without prefacing it himself with some general re-

marks on wheat and clover ; and, even then, he dared not for his life call the song a song, but disguised it in the bill as an "Illustration." In the library also—fitted with shelves for three thousand books, and containing upwards of one hundred and seventy (presented copies mostly), seething their edges in damp plaster—there was such a painfully apologetic return of 62 offenders who had read Travels, Popular Biography, and mere Fiction descriptive of the aspirations of the hearts and souls of mere human creatures like themselves ; and such an elaborate parade of 2 bright examples who had had down Euclid after the day's occupation and confinement ; and 3 who had had down Metaphysics after ditto ; and 1 who had had down Theology after ditto ; and 4 who had worried Grammar, Political Economy, Botany, and Logarithms all at once after ditto ; that I suspected the boasted class to be one man, who had been hired to do it.

Emerging from the Mechanics' Institution, and continuing my walk about the town, I still noticed everywhere the prevalence, to an extraordinary degree, of this custom of putting the natural demand for amusement out of sight, as some untidy housekeepers put dust, and pretending that it was swept away. And yet it was ministered to, in a dull and abortive manner, by all who made this feint. Looking in at what is called in Dullborough "the serious bookseller's," where, in my childhood, I had studied the faces of numbers of gentlemen depicted in rostrums with a gas-light on each side of them, and casting my eyes over the open pages of certain printed discourses there, I found a vast deal of aiming at jocosity and dramatic effect, even in them—yes, verily, even on the part of one very wrathful expounder who bitterly anathematized a poor little Circus. Similarly, in the reading provided for the young people enrolled in the Lasso of Love, and other excellent unions, I found the writers generally under a distressing sense that they must start (at all events) like story-tellers, and delude the young persons into the belief that they were going to be interesting. As I looked in at this window for twenty minutes by the clock, I am in a position to offer a friendly remonstrance—not bearing on this particular point—to the designers and engravers of the pictures in those publications. Have they considered the awful consequences likely to flow from their representations of Virtue ? Have they asked themselves the question, whether the terrific prospect of acquiring that fearful chubbiness of head, unworldliness of arm, feeble dislocation of leg, crispiness of hair, and enormity of shirt collar,

which they represent as inseparable from Goodness, may not tend to confirm sensitive waverers in Evil ? A most impressive example (if I had believed it) of what a Dustman and a Sailor may come to, when they mend their ways, was presented to me in this same shop-window. When they were leaning (they were intimate friends) against a post, drunk and reckless, with surpassingly bad hats on, and their hair over their foreheads, they were rather picturesque, and looked as if they might be agreeable men, if they would not be beasts. But, when they had got over their bad propensities, and when, as a consequence, their heads had swelled alarmingly, their hair had got so curly that it lifted their blown-out cheeks up, their coat-cuffs were so long that they never could do any work, and their eyes were so wide open that they never could do any sleep, they presented a spectacle calculated to plunge a timid nature into the depths of Infamy.

But, the clock that had so degenerated since I saw it last, admonished me that I had stayed here long enough ; and I resumed my walk.

I had not gone fifty paces along the street when I was suddenly brought up by the sight of a man who got out of a little phaeton at the doctor's door, and went into the doctor's house. Immediately the air was filled with the scent of trodden grass, and the perspective of years opened, and at the end of it was a little likeness of this man keeping a wicket, and I said, "God bless my soul ! Joe Specks !"

Through many changes and much work, I had preserved a tenderness for the memory of Joe, forasmuch as we had made the acquaintance of Roderick Random together, and had believed him to be no ruffian, but an ingenuous and engaging hero. Scorning to ask the boy left in the phaeton whether it was really Joe, and scorning even to read the brass plate on the door—so sure was I—I rang the bell, and informed the servant-maid that a stranger sought audience of Mr. Specks. Into a room, half surgery, half study, I was shown to await his coming, and I found it, by a series of elaborate accidents, bestrewn with testimonies to Joe. Portrait of Mr. Specks, bust of Mr. Specks, silver cup from grateful patient to Mr. Specks, presentation sermon from local clergyman, dedication poem from local poet, dinner card from local nobleman, tract on balance of power from local refugee, inscribed *Hommage de l'auteur à Specks*.

When my old school-fellow came in, and I informed him with a smile that I was not a patient, he seemed rather at a loss to perceive

any reason for smiling in connection with that fact, and inquired to what he was to attribute the honour? I asked him, with another smile, could he remember me at all? He had not (he said) that pleasure. I was beginning to have but a poor opinion of Mr. Specks, when he said reflectively, "And yet there's a something too." Upon that, I saw a boyish light in his eyes that looked well, and I asked him if he could inform me, as a stranger who desired to know and had not the means of reference at hand, what the name of the young lady was who married Mr. Random? Upon that, he said "Narcissa," and, after staring for a moment, called me by my name, shook me by the hand, and melted into a roar of laughter. "Why, of course, you'll remember Lucy Green," he said after we had talked a little. "Of course," said I. "Whom do you think she married?" said he. "You?" I hazarded. "Me," said Specks, "and you shall see her." So I saw her, and she was fat, and if all the hay in the world had been heaped upon her, it could scarcely have altered her face more than Time had altered it from my remembrance of the face that had once looked down upon me into the fragrant dungeons of Seringapatam. But when her youngest child came in after dinner (for I dined with them, and we had no other company than Specks, Junior, Barrister-at-law, who went away as soon as the cloth was removed, to look after the young lady to whom he was going to be married next week), I saw again, in that little daughter, the little face of the hay-field, unchanged, and it quite touched my foolish heart. We talked immensely, Specks and Mrs. Specks, and I, and we spoke of our old selves as though our old selves were dead and gone, and indeed indeed they were—dead and gone as the playing-field that had become a wilderness of rusty iron, and the property of S.E.R.

Specks, however, illuminated Dullborough with the rays of interest that I wanted, and should otherwise have missed in it, and linked its present to its past with a highly agreeable chain. And in Specks's society I had new occasion to observe what I had before noticed in similar communications among other men. All the school-fellows and others of old, whom I inquired about, had either done superlatively well or superlatively ill—had either become uncertificated bankrupts, or been felonious, and got themselves transported; or had made great hits in life, and done wonders. And this is so commonly the case, that I never can imagine what becomes of all the mediocre people of people's youth—especially considering that we

find no lack of the species in our maturity. But, I did not propound this difficulty to Specks, for no pause in the conversation gave me an occasion. Nor could I discover one single flaw in the good doctor—when he reads this, he will receive in a friendly spirit the pleasantly-meant record—except that he had forgotten his Roderick Random, and that he confounded Strap with Lieutenant Hatchway; who never knew Random, howsoever intimate with Pickle.

When I went alone to the Railway to catch my train at night (Specks had meant to go with me, but was inopportunately called out), I was in a more charitable mood with Dullborough than I had been all day; and yet in my heart I had loved it all day too. Ah! who was I that I should quarrel with the town for being changed to me, when I myself had come back so changed to it? All my early readings and early imaginations dated from this place, and I took them away so full of innocent construction and guileless belief, and I brought them back so worn and torn, so much the wiser and so much the worse!

XIII.

NIGHT WALKS.

SOME years ago, a temporary inability to sleep, referable to a distressing impression, caused me to walk about the streets all night for a series of several nights. The disorder might have taken a long time to conquer, if it had been faintly experimented on in bed; but, it was soon defeated by the brisk treatment of getting up directly after lying down, and going out, and coming home tired at sunrise.

In the course of those nights I finished my education in a fair amateur experience of Houselessness. My principal object being to get through the night, the pursuit of it brought me into sympathetic relations with people who have no other object every night in the year.

The month was March, and the weather damp, cloudy, and cold. The sun not rising before half-past five, the night perspective looked sufficiently long at half-past twelve: which was about my time for confronting it.

The restlessness of a great city, and the way in which it tumbles and tosses before it can get to sleep, formed one of the first entertainments offered to the contemplation of us houseless people. It lasted about two hours. We lost a

great deal of companionship when the late public-houses turned their lamps out, and when the potmen thrust the last brawling drunkards into the street; but stray vehicles and stray people were left us after that. If we were very lucky, a policeman's rattle sprang, and a fray turned up; but, in general, surprisingly little of this diversion was provided. Except in the Hay-market, which is the worst-kept part of London, and about Kent Street in the Borough, and along a portion of the line of the Old Kent Road, the peace was seldom violently broken. But, it was always the case that London, as if in imitation of individual citizens belonging to it, had expiring fits and starts of restlessness. After all seemed quiet, if one cab rattled by, half-a-dozen would surely follow; and Houselessness even observed that intoxicated people appeared to be magnetically attracted towards each other; so that we knew, when we saw one drunken object staggering against the shutters of a shop, that another drunken object would stagger up before five minutes were out, to fraternise or fight with it. When we made a divergence from the regular species of drunkard, the thin-armed, puff-faced, leaden-lipped gin-drinker, and encountered a rarer specimen of a more decent appearance, fifty to one but that specimen was dressed in soiled mourning. As the street experience in the night, so the street experience in the day; the common folk who come unexpectedly into a little property, come unexpectedly into a deal of liquor.

At length these flickering sparks would die away, worn out—the last veritable sparks of waking life trailed from some late pie-man or hot-potato man—and London would sink to rest. And then the yearning of the houseless mind would be for any sign of company, any lighted place, any movement, anything suggestive of any one being up—nay, even so much as awake, for the houseless eye looked out for lights in windows.

Walking the streets under the pattering rain, Houselessness would walk and walk and walk, seeing nothing but the interminable tangle of streets, save at a corner, here and there, two policemen in conversation, or the sergeant or inspector looking after his men. Now and then in the night—but rarely—Houselessness would become aware of a furtive head peering out of a doorway a few yards before him, and, coming up with the head, would find a man standing bolt upright to keep within the doorway's shadow, and evidently intent upon no particular service to society. Under a kind of fascination, and in a ghostly silence suitable to the time,

Houselessness and this gentleman would eye one another from head to foot, and so, without exchange of speech, part, mutually suspicious. Drip, drip, drip, from ledge and coping, splash from pipes and water-spouts, and by-and-by the houseless shadow would fall upon the stones that pave the way to Waterloo Bridge; it being in the houseless mind to have a halfpennyworth of excuse for saying "Good night" to the toll-keeper, and catching a glimpse of his fire. A good fire, and a good great-coat and a good woollen neck-shawl, were comfortable things to see in conjunction with the toll-keeper; also his brisk wakefulness was excellent company when he rattled the change of halfpence down upon that metal table of his, like a man who defied the night, with all its sorrowful thoughts, and didn't care for the coming of dawn. There was need of encouragement on the threshold of the bridge, for the bridge was dreary. The chopped-up murdered man had not been lowered with a rope over the parapet when those nights were; he was alive, and slept then quietly enough most likely, and undisturbed by any dream of where he was to come. But the river had an awful look, the buildings on the banks were muffled in black shrouds, and the reflected lights seemed to originate deep in the water, as if the spectres of suicides were holding them to show where they went down. The wild moon and clouds were as restless as an evil conscience in a tumbled bed, and the very shadow of the immensity of London seemed to lie oppressively upon the river.

Between the bridge and the two great theatres there was but the distance of a few hundred paces, so the theatres came next. Grim and black within, at night, those great dry Wells, and lonesome to imagine, with the rows of faces faded out, the lights extinguished, and the seats all empty. One would think that nothing in them knew itself at such a time but Yorick's skull. In one of my night walks, as the church steeples were shaking the March winds and rain with the strokes of Four, I passed the outer boundary of one of these great deserts, and entered it. With a dim lantern in my hand, I groped my well-known way to the stage, and looked over the orchestra—which was like a great grave dug for a time of pestilence—into the void beyond. A dismal cavern of an immense aspect, with the chandelier gone dead like everything else, and nothing visible, through mist and fog and space, but tiers of winding-sheets. The ground at my feet, where, when last there, I had seen the peasantry of Naples dancing among the vines, reckless of the burning

mountain which threatened to overwhelm them, was now in possession of a strong serpent of engine-hose, watchfully lying in wait for the serpent Fire, and ready to fly at it if it showed its forked tongue. A ghost of a watchman, carrying a faint corpse-candle, haunted the distant upper gallery and flitted away. Retiring within the proscenium, and holding my light above my head towards the rolled-up curtain—green no more, but black as ebony—my sight lost itself in a gloomy vault, showing faint indications in it of a shipwreck of canvas and cordage. Methought I felt much as a diver might at the bottom of the sea.

In those small hours when there was no movement in the streets, it afforded matter for reflection to take Newgate in the way, and, touching its rough stone, to think of the prisoners in their sleep, and then to glance in at the lodge over the spiked wicket, and see the fire and light of the watching turnkeys on the white wall. Not an inappropriate time, either, to linger by that wicked little Debtors' Door—shutting tighter than any other door one ever saw—which has been Death's Door to so many. In the days of the uttering of forged one-pound notes by people tempted up from the country, how many hundreds of wretched creatures of both sexes—many quite innocent—swung out of a pitiless and inconsistent world, with the tower of yonder Christian church of St. Sepulchre monstrosly before their eyes! Is there any haunting of the Bank Parlour, by the remorseful souls of old directors, in the nights of these later days, I wonder, or is it as quiet as this degenerate Aeldama of an Old Bailey?

To walk on to the Bank, lamenting the good old times and bemoaning the present evil period, would be an easy next step, so I would take it, and would make my houseless circuit of the Bank, and give a thought to the treasure within; likewise to the guard of soldiers passing the night there, and nodding over the fire. Next, I went to Billingsgate, in some hope of market-people, but it proving as yet too early, crossed London Bridge, and got down by the water-side on the Surrey shore, among the buildings of the great brewery. There was plenty going on at the brewery; and the reek, and the smell of grains, and the rattling of the plump dray horses at their mangers, were capital company. Quite refreshed by having mingled with this good society, I made a new start with a new heart, setting the old King's Bench Prison before me for my next object, and resolving, when I should come to the wall, to think of poor Horace Kinch, and the Dry Rot in men.

A very curious disease the Dry Rot in men, and difficult to detect the beginning of. It had carried Horace Kinch inside the wall of the old King's Bench Prison, and it had carried him out with his feet foremost. He was a likely man to look at, in the prime of life, well to do, as clever as he needed to be, and popular among many friends. He was suitably married, and had healthy and pretty children. But, like some fair-looking houses or fair-looking ships, he took the Dry Rot. The first strong external revelation of the Dry Rot in men is a tendency to lurk and lounge; to be at street corners without intelligible reason; to be going anywhere when met; to be about many places rather than at any; to do nothing tangible, but to have an intention of performing a variety of intangible duties to-morrow, or the day after. When this manifestation of the disease is observed, the observer will usually connect it with a vague impression once formed or received, that the patient was living a little too hard. He will scarcely have had leisure to turn it over in his mind, and form the terrible suspicion "Dry Rot," when he will notice a change for the worse in the patient's appearance: a certain slovenliness and deterioration which is not poverty, nor dirt, nor intoxication, nor ill-health, but simply Dry Rot. To this succeeds a smell as of strong waters in the morning; to that, a looseness respecting money; to that, a stronger smell as of strong waters at all times; to that, a looseness respecting everything; to that, a trembling of the limbs, somnolency, misery, and crumbling to pieces. As it is in wood, so it is in men. Dry Rot advances at a compound usury quite incalculable. A plank is found infected with it, and the whole structure is devoted. Thus it had been with the unhappy Horace Kinch, lately buried by a small subscription. Those who knew him had not nigh done saying, "So well off, so comfortably established, with such hope before him—and yet, it is feared, with a slight touch of Dry Rot!" when lo! the man was all Dry Rot and dust.

From the dead wall associated on those houseless nights with this too common story, I chose next to wander by Bethlehem Hospital; partly because it lay on my road round to Westminster; partly because I had a night fancy in my head which could be best pursued within sight of its walls and dome. And the fancy was this: Are not the sane and insane equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming? Are not all of us outside this hospital, who dream, more or less in the condition of those inside it, every night of our lives? Are we not nightly persuaded, as

they daily are, that we associate preposterously with kings and queens, emperors and empresses, and notabilities of all sorts? Do we not nightly jumble events and personages, and times and places, as these do daily? Are we not sometimes troubled by our own sleeping inconsistencies, and do we not vexedly try to account for them or excuse them, just as these do sometimes in respect of their waking delusions? Said an afflicted man to me, when I was last in a hospital like this, "Sir, I can frequently fly." I was half ashamed to reflect that so could I—by night. Said a woman to me on the same occasion, "Queen Victoria frequently comes to dine with me, and her Majesty and I dine off peaches and macaroni in our nightgowns, and his Royal Highness the Prince Consort does us the honour to make a third on horseback in a Field-Marshal's uniform." Could I refrain from reddening with consciousness when I remembered the amazing royal parties I myself had given (at night), the unaccountable viands I had put on table, and my extraordinary manner of conducting myself on those distinguished occasions? I wonder that the great master who knew everything, when he called Sleep the death of each day's life, did not call Dreams the insanity of each day's sanity.

By this time I had left the hospital behind me, and was again setting towards the river; and in a short breathing space I was on Westminster Bridge, regaling my houseless eyes with the external walls of the British Parliament—the perfection of a stupendous institution, I know, and the admiration of all surrounding nations and succeeding ages, I do not doubt, but perhaps a little the better, now and then, for being pricked up to its work. Turning off into Old Palace Yard, the Courts of Law kept me company for a quarter of an hour; hinting in low whispers what numbers of people they were keeping awake, and how intensely wretched and horrible they were rendering the small hours to unfortunate suitors. Westminster Abbey was fine gloomy society for another quarter of an hour; suggesting a wonderful procession of its dead among the dark arches and pillars, each century more amazed by the century following it than by all the centuries going before. And, indeed, in those houseless night walks—which even included cemeteries where watchmen went round among the graves at stated times, and moved the tell-tale handle of an index which recorded that they had touched it at such an hour—it was a solemn consideration what enormous hosts of dead belong to one old great city, and how, if they were raised while the liv-

ing slept, there would not be the space of a pin's point in all the streets and ways for the living to come out into. Not only that, but the vast armies of dead would overflow the hills and valleys beyond the city, and would stretch away all round it, God knows how far.

When a church clock strikes on houseless ears in the dead of the night, it may be at first mistaken for company, and hailed as such. But, as the spreading circles of vibration, which you may perceive at such a time with great clearness, go opening out, for ever and ever afterwards widening, perhaps (as the philosopher has suggested) in eternal space, the mistake is rectified, and the sense of loneliness is profounder. Once—it was after leaving the Abbey, and turning my face north—I came to the great steps of St. Martin's Church as the clock was striking Three. Suddenly, a thing that in a moment more I should have trodden upon without seeing, rose up at my feet with a cry of loneliness and houselessness, struck out of it by the bell, the like of which I never heard. We then stood face to face looking at one another, frightened by one another. The creature was like a beetle-browed hare-lipped youth of twenty, and it had a loose bundle of rags on, which it held together with one of its hands. It shivered from head to foot, and its teeth chattered, and as it stared at me—persecutor, devil, ghost, whatever it thought me—it made with its whining mouth as if it were snapping at me, like a worried dog. Intending to give this ugly object money, I put out my hand to stay it—for it recoiled as it whined and snapped—and I laid my hand upon its shoulder. Instantly, it twisted out of its garment, like the young man in the New Testament, and left me standing alone with its rags in my hand.

Covent-Garden Market, when it was market morning, was wonderful company. The great waggons of cabbages, with growers' men and boys lying asleep under them, and with sharp dogs from market-garden neighbourhoods looking after the whole, were as good as a party. But one of the worst night sights I know in London is to be found in the children who prowl about this place; who sleep in the baskets, fight for the offal, dart at any object they think they can lay their thieving hands on, dive under the carts and barrows, dodge the constables, and are perpetually making a blunt pattering on the pavement of the Piazza with the rain of their naked feet. A painful and unnatural result comes of the comparison one is forced to institute between the growth of corruption as displayed in the so much improved and cared-for

fruits of the earth, and the growth of corruption as displayed in these all-uncared-for (except inasmuch as ever-hunted) savages.

There was early coffee to be got about Covent-Garden Market, and that was more company—warm company, too, which was better. Toast of a very substantial quality was likewise procurable: though the tousled-headed man who made it, in an inner chamber within the coffee-room, hadn't got his coat on yet, and was so heavy with sleep that in every interval of toast and coffee he went off anew behind the partition into complicated cross-roads of choke and snore, and lost his way directly. Into one of these establishments (among the earliest) near Bow Street there came one morning, as I sat over my houseless cup, pondering where to go next, a man in a high and long snuff-coloured coat, and shoes, and, to the best of my belief, nothing else but a hat, who took out of his hat a large cold meat-pudding; a meat-pudding so large that it was a very tight fit, and brought the lining of the hat out with it. This mysterious man was known by his pudding, for, on his entering, the man of sleep brought him a pint of hot tea, a small loaf, and a large knife and fork and plate. Left to himself in his box, he stood the pudding on the bare table, and, instead of cutting it, stabbed it, overhand, with the knife, like a mortal enemy; then took the knife out, wiped it on his sleeve, tore the pudding asunder with his fingers, and ate it all up. The remembrance of this man with the pudding remains with me as the remembrance of the most spectral person my houselessness encountered. Twice only was I in that establishment, and twice I saw him stalk in (as I should say, just out of bed, and presently going back to bed), take out his pudding, stab his pudding, wipe the dagger, and eat his pudding all up. He was a man whose figure promised cadaverousness, but who had an excessively red face, though shaped like a horse's. On the second occasion of my seeing him, he said huskily to the man of sleep, "Am I red to-night?" "You are," he uncompromisingly answered. "My mother," said the spectre, "was a red-faced woman that liked drink, and I looked at her hard when she laid in her coffin, and I took the complexion." Somehow, the pudding seemed an unwholesome pudding after that, and I put myself in its way no more.

When there was no market, or when I wanted variety, a railway terminus, with the morning mails coming in, was remunerative company. But, like most of the company to be had in this world, it lasted only a very short time. The station lamps would burst out ablaze, the porters

would emerge from places of concealment, the cabs and trucks would rattle to their places (the Post-Office carts were already in theirs), and finally, the bell would strike up, and the train would come banging in. But there were few passengers and little luggage, and everything scuttled away with the greatest expedition. The locomotive post-offices, with their great nets—as if they had been dragging the country for bodies—would fly open as to their doors, and would disgorge a smell of lamp, an exhausted clerk, a guard in a red coat, and their bags of letters; the engine would blow and heave and perspire, like an engine wiping its forehead, and saying what a run it had had; and within ten minutes the lamps were out, and I was houseless and alone again.

But now there were driven cattle on the high-road near, wanting (as cattle always do) to turn into the midst of stone walls, and squeeze themselves through six inches' width of iron railing, and getting their heads down (also as cattle always do) for tossing-purchase at quite imaginary dogs, and giving themselves and every devoted creature associated with them a most extraordinary amount of unnecessary trouble. Now, too, the conscious gas began to grow pale with the knowledge that daylight was coming, and straggling workpeople were already in the streets, and, as waking life had become extinguished with the last pieman's sparks, so it began to be rekindled with the fires of the first street-corner breakfast-sellers. And so by faster and faster degrees, until the last degrees were very fast, the day came, and I was tired and could sleep. And it is not, as I used to think, going home at such times, the least wonderful thing in London, that, in the real desert region of the night, the houseless wanderer is alone there. I knew well enough where to find Vice and Misfortune of all kinds, if I had chosen; but they were put out of sight, and my houselessness had many miles upon miles of streets in which it could, and did, have its own solitary way.

XIV.

CHAMBERS.

HAVING occasion to transact some business with a solicitor who occupies a highly suicidal set of chambers in Gray's Inn, I afterwards took a turn in the large square of that stronghold of Melancholy, reviewing, with congenial surroundings, my experiences of Chambers.

I began, as was natural, with the chambers I had just left. They were an upper set on a rotten staircase, with a mysterious bunk or bulkhead on the landing outside them, of a rather nautical and Screw-Collier-like appearance than otherwise, and painted an intense black. Many dusty years have passed since the appropriation of this Davy Jones's locker to any purpose, and, during the whole period within the memory of a living man, it has been hasped and padlocked. I cannot quite satisfy my mind whether it was originally meant for the reception of coals, or bodies, or as a place of temporary security for the plunder "looted" by laundresses; but I incline to the last opinion. It is about breast high, and usually serves as a bulk for defendants in reduced circumstances to lean against and ponder at, when they come on the hopeful errand of trying to make an arrangement without money—under which auspicious circumstances it mostly happens that the legal gentleman they want to see is much engaged, and they pervade the staircase for a considerable period. Against this opposing bulk, in the absurdest manner, the tomb-like outer door of the solicitor's chambers (which is also of an intense black) stands in dark unbrush, half open, and half shut, all day. The solicitor's apartments are three in number; consisting of a slice, a cell, and a wedge. The slice is assigned to the two clerks, the cell is occupied by the principal, and the wedge is devoted to stray papers, old game baskets from the country, a washing-stand, and a model of a patent Ship's Caboose which was exhibited in Chancery, at the commencement of the present century, on an application for an injunction to restrain infringement. At about half-past nine on every weekday morning, the younger of the two clerks (who, I have reason to believe, leads the fashion at Pentonville in the articles of pipes and shirts) may be found knocking the dust out of his official door-key on the bunk or locker before mentioned; and so exceedingly subject to dust is his key, and so very retentive of that superfluity, that in exceptional summer weather, when a ray of sun-light has fallen on the locker in my presence, I have noticed its inexpressive countenance to be deeply marked by a kind of Bramah erysipelas or small-pox.

This set of chambers (as I have gradually discovered, when I have had restless occasion to make inquiries or leave messages after office hours) is under the charge of a lady named Sweeney, in figure extremely like an old family umbrella: whose dwelling confronts a dead wall in a court off Gray's Inn Lane, and who is usually fetched into the passage of that bower,

when wanted, from some neighbouring home of industry, which has the curious property of imparting an inflammatory appearance to her visage. Mrs. Sweeney is one of the race of professed laundresses, and is the compiler of a remarkable manuscript volume entitled "Mrs. Sweeney's Book," from which much curious statistical information may be gathered respecting the high prices and small uses of soda, soap, sand, fire-wood, and other such articles. I have created a legend in my mind—and consequently I believe it with the utmost pertinacity—that the late Mr. Sweeney was a ticket porter under the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, and that, in consideration of his long and valuable services, Mrs. Sweeney was appointed to her present post. For, though devoid of personal charms, I have observed this lady to exercise a fascination over the elderly ticket-porter mind (particularly under the gateway, and in corners and entries), which I can only refer to her being one of the fraternity, yet not competing with it. All that need be said concerning this set of chambers is said, when I have added that it is in a large double house in Gray's Inn Square, very much out of repair, and that the outer portal is ornamented in a hideous manner with certain stone remains, which have the appearance of the dismembered bust, torso, and limbs of a petrified benchman.

Indeed, I look upon Gray's Inn generally as one of the most depressing institutions in brick and mortar known to the children of men. Can anything be more dreary than its arid Square, Sahara Desert of the law, with the ugly old tile-topped tenements, the dirty windows, the bills To Let, To Let, the door-posts inscribed like gravestones, the crazy gateway giving upon the filthy Lane, the scowling iron-barred prison-like passage into Verulam Buildings, the mouldy red-nosed ticket porters with little coffin plates, and why with aprons, the dry hard atomy-like appearance of the whole dust-heap? When my uncommercial travels tend to this dismal spot, my comfort is its rickety state. Imagination gloats over the fulness of time when the staircases shall have quite tumbled down—they are daily wearing into an ill-savoured powder, but have not quite tumbled down yet—when the last old prolix benchman, all of the olden time, shall have been got out of an upper window by means of a Fire Ladder, and carried off to the Holborn Union; when the last clerk shall have engrossed the last parchment behind the last splash on the last of the mud-stained windows, which, all through the miry year, are pilloried out of recognition in Gray's Inn Lane. Then shall a squalid little trench, with rank grass and

a pump in it, lying between the coffee-house and South Square, be wholly given up to cats and rats, and not, as now, have its empire divided between those animals and a few briefless bipeds—surely called to the Bar by voices of deceiving spirits, seeing that they are wanted there by no mortal—who glance down, with eyes better glazed than their casements, from their dreary and lack-lustre rooms. Then shall the way Nor-Westward, now lying under a short grim colonnade, where in summer-time pounce flies from law-stationing windows into the eyes of laymen, be choked with rubbish, and happily become impassable. Then shall the gardens where turf, trees, and gravel wear a legal livery of black, run rank, and pilgrims go to Gorbambury to see Bacon's effigy as he sat, and not come here (which in truth they seldom do) to see where he walked. Then, in a word, shall the old-established vendor of periodicals sit alone in his little crib of a shop behind the Holborn Gate, like that lumbering Marius among the ruins of Carthage, who has sat heavy on a thousand million of similes.

At one period of my uncommercial career I much frequented another set of chambers in Gray's Inn Square. They were what is familiarly called "a top set," and all the eatables and drinkables introduced into them acquired a flavour of Cock-loft. I have known an unopened Strasbourg pâté, fresh from Fortnum and Mason's, to draw in this cock-loft tone through its crockery dish, and become penetrated with cock-loft to the core of its inmost truffle in three-quarters of an hour. This, however, was not the most curious feature of those chambers; that consisted in the profound conviction entertained by my esteemed friend Parkle (their tenant) that they were clean. Whether it was an inborn hallucination, or whether it was imparted to him by Mrs. Miggot the laundress, I never could ascertain. But, I believe he would have gone to the stake upon the question. Now, they were so dirty that I could take off the distinctest impression of my figure on any article of furniture by merely lounging upon it for a few moments; and it used to be a private amusement of mine to print myself off—if I may use the expression—all over the rooms. It was the first large circulation I had. At other times I have accidentally shaken a window curtain while in animated conversation with Parkle, and struggling insects which were certainly red, and were certainly not ladybirds, have dropped on the back of my hand. Yet Parkle lived in that top set years, bound body and soul to the superstition that they were clean. He used to say,

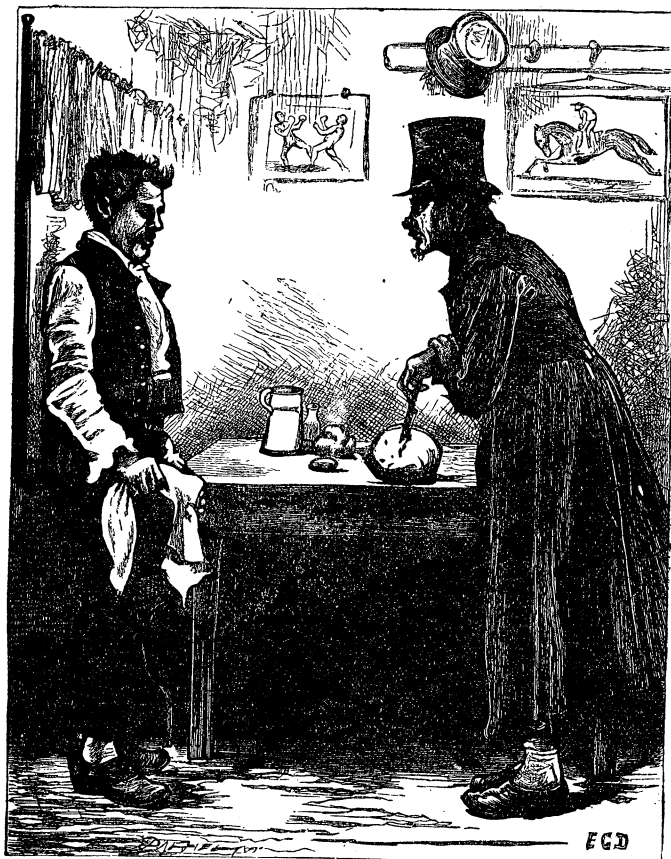
when congratulated upon them, "Well, they are not like chambers in one respect, you know; they are clean." Concurrently, he had an idea which he could never explain, that Mrs. Miggot was in some way connected with the Church. When he was in particularly good spirits, he used to believe that a deceased uncle of hers had been a Dean; when he was poorly and low, he believed that her brother had been a Curate. I and Mrs. Miggot (she was a genteel woman) were on confidential terms, but I never knew her to commit herself to any distinct assertion on the subject; she merely claimed a proprietorship in the Church, by looking, when it was mentioned, as if the reference awakened the slumbering Past, and were personal. It may have been his amiable confidence in Mrs. Miggot's better days that inspired my friend with his delusion respecting the chambers, but he never wavered in his fidelity to it for a moment, though he wallowed in dirt seven years.

Two of the windows of these chambers looked down into the garden; and we have sat up there together many a summer evening, saying how pleasant it was, and talking of many things. To my intimacy with that top set, I am indebted for three of my liveliest personal impressions of the loneliness of life in chambers. They shall follow here in order; first, second, and third.

First. My Gray's Inn friend, on a time, hurt one of his legs, and it became seriously inflamed. Not knowing of his indisposition, I was on my way to visit him as usual, one summer evening, when I was much surprised by meeting a lively leech in Field Court, Gray's Inn, seemingly on his way to the West-end of London. As the leech was alone, and was, of course, unable to explain his position, even if he had been inclined to do so (which he had not the appearance of being), I passed him and went on. Turning the corner of Gray's Inn Square, I was beyond expression amazed by meeting another leech—also entirely alone, and also proceeding in a westerly direction, though with less decision of purpose. Ruminating on this extraordinary circumstance, and endeavouring to remember whether I had ever read, in the Philosophical Transactions or any work on Natural History, of a migration of Leeches, I ascended to the top set, past the dreary series of closed outer doors of offices, and an empty set or two which intervened between that lofty region and the surface. Entering my friend's rooms, I found him stretched upon his back, like Prometheus Bound, with a perfectly demented ticket porter in attendance on him instead of the Vulture: which helpless individual, who was feeble and

frightened, and had (my friend explained to me, in great choler) been endeavouring for some hours to apply leeches to his leg, and as yet had only got on two out of twenty. To this Unfortunate's distraction between a damp cloth on which he had placed the leeches to freshen

them, and the wrathful adjurations of my friend to "Stick 'em on, sir!" I referred the phenomenon I had encountered: the rather as two fine specimens were at that moment going out at the door, while a general insurrection of the rest was in progress on the table. After awhile



"AM I RED TO-NIGHT?" "YOU ARE," HE UNCOMPROMISINGLY ANSWERED.

our united efforts prevailed, and, when the leeches came off and had recovered their spirits, we carefully tied them up in a decanter. But I never heard more of them than that they were all gone next morning, and that the Out-of-door young man of Bickle, Bush, and Bodger, on the ground-floor, had been bitten and bloodied by

some creature not identified. They never "took" on Mrs. Miggot, the laundress; but, I have always preserved fresh the belief that she unconsciously carried several about her, until they gradually found openings in life.

Second. On the same staircase with my friend Parkle, and on the same floor, there

lived a man of law who pursued his business elsewhere, and used those chambers as his place of residence. For three or four years, Parkle rather knew of him than knew him, but after that—for Englishmen—short pause of consideration, they began to speak. Parkle exchanged words with him in his private character only, and knew nothing of his business ways, or means. He was a man a good deal about town, but always alone. We used to remark to one another that, although we often encountered him in theatres, concert-rooms, and similar public places, he was always alone. Yet he was not a gloomy man, and was of a decidedly conversational turn; inasmuch that he would sometimes of an evening lounge with a cigar in his mouth, half in and half out of Parkle's rooms, and discuss the topics of the day by the hour. He used to hint, on these occasions, that he had four faults to find with life; firstly, that it obliged a man to be always winding up his watch; secondly, that London was too small; thirdly, that it therefore wanted variety; fourthly, that there was too much dust in it. There was so much dust in his own faded chambers, certainly, that they reminded me of a sepulchre, furnished in prophetic anticipation of the present time, which had newly been brought to light, after having remained buried a few thousand years. One dry hot autumn evening at twilight, this man, being then five years turned of fifty, looked in upon Parkle in his usual lounging way, with his cigar in his mouth as usual, and said, "I am going out of town." As he never went out of town, Parkle said, "Oh, indeed! At last?" "Yes," says he, "at last. For what is a man to do? London is so small! If you go West, you come to Hounslow. If you go East, you come to Bow. If you go South, there's Brixton or Norwood. If you go North, you can't get rid of Barnet. Then, the monotony of all the streets, streets, streets—and of all the roads, roads, roads—and the dust, dust, dust!" When he had said this, he wished Parkle a good evening, but came back again and said, with his watch in his hand, "Oh! I really cannot go on winding up this watch over and over again; I wish you would take care of it." So, Parkle laughed and consented, and the man went out of town. The man remained out of town so long, that his letter-box became choked, and no more letters could be got into it, and they began to be left at the lodge and to accumulate there. At last the head porter decided, on conference with the steward, to use his master-key, and look into the chambers, and give them the benefit of a whiff of air. Then, it was found that he had hanged

THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER, 6

himself to his bedstead, and had left this written memorandum: "I should prefer to be cut down by my neighbour and friend (if he will allow me to call him so), H. Parkle, Esq." This was an end of Parkle's occupancy of chambers. He went into lodgings immediately.

Third. While Parkle lived in Gray's Inn, and I myself was uncommercially preparing for the Bar—which is done, as everybody knows, by having a frayed old gown put on in a pantry by an old woman in a chronic state of St. Anthony's fire and dropsy, and, so decorated, bolting a bad dinner in a party of four, whereof each individual mistrusts the other three—I say, while these things were, there was a certain elderly gentleman who lived in a court of the Temple, and was a great judge and lover of port wine. Every day he dined at his club, and drank his bottle or two of port wine, and every night came home to the Temple, and went to bed in his lonely chambers. This had gone on many years without variation, when one night he had a fit on coming home, and fell, and cut his head deep, but partly recovered, and groped about in the dark to find the door. When he was afterwards discovered, dead, it was clearly established by the marks of his hands about the room that he must have done so. Now, this chanced on the night of Christmas Eve, and over him lived a young fellow who had sisters and young country friends, and who gave them a little party that night, in the course of which they played at Blind-man's Buff. They played that game, for their greater sport, by the light of the fire only; and once, when they were all quietly rustling and stealing about, and the blind man was trying to pick out the prettiest sister (for which I am far from blaming him), somebody cried, Hark! The man below must be playing Blind-man's Buff by himself to-night! They listened, and they heard sounds of someone falling about and stumbling against furniture, and they all laughed at the conceit, and went on with their play, more light-hearted and merry than ever. Thus, those two so different games of life and death were played out together, blindfolded, in the two sets of chambers.

Such are the occurrences, which, coming to my knowledge, imbued me long ago with a strong sense of the loneliness of chambers. There was a fantastic illustration to much the same purpose, implicitly believed by a strange sort of man now dead, whom I knew when I had not quite arrived at legal years of discretion, though I was already in the uncommercial line.

This was a man who, though not more than thirty, had seen the world in divers irreconcil-

able capacities—had been an officer in a South American regiment among other odd things—but had not achieved much in any way of life, and was in debt, and in hiding. He occupied chambers of the dreariest nature in Lyons Inn; his name, however, was not up on the door, or door-post, but in lieu of it stood the name of a friend who had died in the chambers, and had given him the furniture. The story arose out of the furniture, and was to this effect:—Let the former holder of the chambers, whose name was still upon the door and door-post, be Mr. Testator.

Mr. Testator took a set of chambers in Lyons Inn when he had but very scanty furniture for his bedroom, and none for his sitting-room. He had lived some wintry months in this condition, and had found it very bare and cold. One night, past midnight, when he sat writing, and still had writing to do that must be done before he went to bed, he found himself out of coals. He had coals down-stairs, but had never been to his cellar; however, the cellar key was on his mantel-shelf, and, if he went down and opened the cellar it fitted, he might fairly assume the coals in that cellar to be his. As to his laundress, she lived among the coal-waggons and Thames watermen—for there were Thames watermen at that time—in some unknown rat-hole by the river, down lanes and alleys on the other side of the Strand. As to any other person to meet him or obstruct him, Lyons Inn was dreaming, drunk, maudlin, moody, betting, brooding over bill discounting or renewing—asleep or awake, minding its own affairs. Mr. Testator took his coal-scuttle in one hand, his candle and key in the other, and descended to the dimmallest underground dens of Lyons Inn, where the late vehicles in the streets became thunderous, and all the water-pipes in the neighbourhood seemed to have Macbeth's Amen sticking in their throats, and to be trying to get it out. After groping here and there among low doors to no purpose, Mr. Testator at length came to a door with a rusty padlock which his key fitted. Getting the door open with much trouble, and looking in, he found, no coals, but a confused pile of furniture. Alarmed by this intrusion on another man's property, he locked the door again, found his own cellar, filled his scuttle, and returned up-stairs.

But the furniture he had seen ran on casters across' and across Mr. Testator's mind incessantly, when, in the chill hour of five in the morning, he got to bed. He particularly wanted a table to write at, and a table expressly made to be written at had been the piece of furniture

in the foreground of the heap. When his laundress emerged from her burrow in the morning to make his kettle boil, he artfully led up to the subject of cellars and furniture; but the two ideas had evidently no connection in her mind. When she left him, and he sat at his breakfast, thinking about the furniture, he recalled the rusty state of the padlock, and inferred that the furniture must have been stored in the cellars for a long time—was perhaps forgotten—owner dead, perhaps? After thinking it over a few days, in the course of which he could pump nothing out of Lyons Inn about the furniture, he became desperate, and resolved to borrow that table. He did so that night. He had not had the table long, when he determined to borrow an easy-chair; he had not had that long, when he made up his mind to borrow a book-case; then, a couch; then, a carpet and rug. By that time, he felt he was "in furniture stepped in so far," as that it could be no worse to borrow it all. Consequently, he borrowed it all, and locked up the cellar for good. He had always locked it after every visit. He had carried up every separate article in the dead of the night, and, at the best, had felt as wicked as a Resurrection Man. Every article was blue and furry when brought into his rooms, and he had had, in a murderous and guilty sort of way, to polish it up while London slept.

Mr. Testator lived in his furnished chambers two or three years, or more, and gradually lulled himself into the opinion that the furniture was his own. This was his convenient state of mind when, late one night, a step came up the stairs, and a hand passed over his door, feeling for his knocker, and then one deep and solemn rap was rapped, that night have been a spring in Mr. Testator's easy-chair to shoot him out of it; so promptly was it attended with that effect.

With a candle in his hand, Mr. Testator went to the door, and found there a very pale and very tall man; a man who stooped; a man with very high shoulders, a very narrow chest, and a very red nose; a shabby-genteel man. He was wrapped in a long threadbare black coat, fastened up the front with more pins than buttons, and under his arm he squeezed an umbrella without a handle, as if he were playing bagpipes. He said, "I ask your pardon, but can you tell me—" and stopped; his eyes resting on some object within the chambers.

"Can I tell you what?" asked Mr. Testator, noting his stoppage with quick alarm.

"I ask your pardon," said the stranger, "but—this is not the inquiry I was going to make—

do I see in there any small article of property belonging to me?"

Mr. Testator was beginning to stammer that he was not aware—when the visitor slipped past him into the chambers. There, in a goblin way which froze Mr. Testator to the marrow, he examined, first, the writing-table, and said, "Mine;" then, the easy-chair, and said, "Mine;" then, the bookcase, and said, "Mine;" then, turned up a corner of the carpet, and said, "Mine!" in a word, inspected every item of furniture from the cellar in succession, and said, "Mine!" Towards the end of this investigation, Mr. Testator perceived that he was sodden with liquor, and that the liquor was gin. He was not unsteady with gin, either in his speech or carriage; but he was stiff with gin in both particulars.

Mr. Testator was in a dreadful state, for (according to his making out of the story) the possible consequences of what he had done in recklessness and hardihood flashed upon him in their fulness for the first time. When they had stood gazing at one another for a little while, he tremulously began:

"Sir, I am conscious that the fullest explanation, compensation, and restitution are your due. They shall be yours. Allow me to entreat that, without temper, without even natural irritation on your part, we may have a little——"

"Drop of something to drink," interposed the stranger. "I am agreeable."

Mr. Testator had intended to say, "a little quiet conversation," but with great relief of mind adopted the amendment. He produced a decanter of gin, and was bustling about for hot water and sugar, when he found that his visitor had already drunk half the decanter's contents. With hot water and sugar the visitor drank the remainder before he had been an hour in the chambers by the chimes of the church of St. Mary in the Strand; and during the process he frequently whispered to himself, "Mine!"

The gin gone, and Mr. Testator wondering what was to follow it, the visitor rose and said, with increased stiffness, "At what hour of the morning, sir, will it be convenient?" Mr. Testator hazarded, "At ten?" "Sir," said the visitor, "at ten, to the moment, I shall be here." He then contemplated Mr. Testator somewhat at leisure, and said, "God bless you! How is your wife?" Mr. Testator (who never had a wife) replied, with much feeling, "Deeply anxious, poor soul, but otherwise well." The visitor thereupon turned and went away, and fell twice in going down-stairs. From that hour he was never heard of. Whether he was a ghost,

or a spectral illusion of conscience, or a drunken man who had no business there, or the drunken rightful owner of the furniture, with a transitory gleam of memory; whether he got safe home, or had no home to get to; whether he died of liquor on the way, or lived in liquor ever afterwards; he never was heard of more. This was the story, received with the furniture, and held to be as substantial, by its second possessor in an upper set of chambers in grim Lyons Inn.

It is to be remarked of chambers in general, that they must have been built for chambers, to have the right kind of loneliness. You may make a great dwelling-house very lonely by isolating suites of rooms, and calling them chambers, but you cannot make the true kind of loneliness. In dwelling-houses there have been family festivals; children have grown in them, girls have bloomed into women in them, courtships and marriages have taken place in them. True chambers never were young, childish, maidenly; never had dolls in them, or rocking-horses, or christenings, or betrothals, or little coffins. Let Gray's Inn identify the child who first touched hands and hearts with Robinson Crusoe in any one of its many "sets," and that child's little statue, in white marble with a golden inscription, shall be at its service, at my cost and charge, as a drinking fountain for the spirit to freshen its thirsty square. Let Lincoln's produce, from all its houses, a twentieth of the procession derivable from any dwelling-house one-twentieth of its age, of fair young brides who married for love and hope, not settlements, and all the Vice-Chancellors shall thenceforward be kept in nosegays for nothing, on application to the writer hereof. It is not denied that on the terrace of the Adelphi, or in any of the streets of that subterranean-stable-haunted spot, or about Bedford Row, or James Street of that ilk (a gruesome place), or anywhere among the neighbourhoods that have done flowering and have run to seed, you may find chambers replete with the accommodations of Solitude, Closeness, and Darkness, where you may be as low-spirited as in the genuine article, and might be as easily murdered, with the placid reputation of having merely gone down to the seaside. But, the many waters of life did run musical in those dry channels once;—among the Inns, never. The only popular legend known in relation to any one of the dull family of Inns is a dark Old Bailey whisper concerning Clement's, and importing how the black creature who holds the sun-dial there was a negro who slew his master, and built the dismal pile out of the contents of his strong-box—for which architectural

offence alone he ought to have been condemned to live in it. But, what populace would waste fancy upon such a place, or on New Inn, Staple Inn, Barnard's Inn, or any of the shabby crew?

The genuine laundress, too, is an institution not to be had in its entirety out of and away from the genuine chambers. Again, it is not denied that you may be robbed elsewhere. Elsewhere you may have—for money—dishonesty, drunkenness, dirt, laziness, and profound incapacity. But the veritable shining-

red-faced shameless laundress; the true Mrs. Sweeney—in figure, colour, texture, and smell like the old damp family umbrella; the tiptop complicated abomination of stockings, spirits, bonnet, limpness, looseness, and larceny; is only to be drawn at the fountain-head. Mrs. Sweeney is beyond the reach of individual art. It requires the united efforts of several men to insure that great result, and it is only developed in perfection under an Honourable Society and in an Inn of Court.



"DROP OF SOMETHING TO DRINK," INTERPOSED THE STRANGER. "I AM AGREEABLE."

XV.

NURSES' STORIES.

THERE are not many places that I find it more agreeable to revisit, when I am in an idle mood, than some places to which I have never been. For, my acquaintance with those spots is of such long standing, and has ripened into an intimacy of so affectionate a nature,

that I take a particular interest in assuring myself that they are unchanged.

I never was in Robinson Crusoe's Island, yet I frequently return there. The colony he established on it soon faded away, and it is uninhabited by any descendants of the grave and courteous Spaniards, or of Will Atkins and the other mutineers, and has relapsed into its original condition. Not a twig of its wicker houses remains, its goats have long run wild again, its

screaming parrots would darken the sun with a cloud of many flaming colours if a gun were fired there, no face is ever reflected in the waters of the little creek which Friday swam across when pursued by his two brother cannibals with sharpened stomachs. After comparing notes with other travellers who have similarly revisited the Island, and conscientiously inspected it, I have satisfied myself that it contains no vestige of Mr. Atkins's domesticity or theology, though his track on the memorable evening of his landing to set his captain ashore, when he was decoyed about and round about until it was dark, and his boat was stove, and his strength and spirits failed him, is yet plainly to be traced. So is the hill-top on which Robinson was struck dumb with joy when the reinstated captain pointed to the ship, riding within half a mile of the shore, that was to bear him away, in the nine-and-twentieth year of his seclusion in that lonely place. So is the sandy beach on which the memorable footstep was impressed, and where the savages hauled up their canoes when they came ashore for those dreadful public dinners, which led to a dancing worse than speech-making. So is the cave where the flaring eyes of the old goat made such a goblin appearance in the dark. So is the site of the hut where Robinson lived with the dog and the parrot and the cat, and where he endured those first agonies of solitude, which—strange to say—never involved any ghostly fancies; a circumstance so very remarkable, that perhaps he left out something in writing his record? Round hundreds of such objects, hidden in the dense tropical foliage, the tropical sea breaks evermore; and over them the tropical sky, saving in the short rainy season, shines bright and cloudless.

Neither was I ever belated among wolves, on the borders of France and Spain; nor did I ever, when night was closing in and the ground was covered with snow, draw up my little company among some felled trees which served as a breastwork, and there fire a train of gunpowder so dexterously that suddenly we had three or four score blazing wolves illuminating the darkness around us. Nevertheless, I occasionally go back to that dismal region, and perform the feat again; when, indeed, to smell the singeing and the frying of the wolves afire, and to see them setting one another alight as they rush and tumble, and to behold them rolling in the snow vainly attempting to put themselves out, and to hear their howlings taken up by all the echoes as well as by all the unseen wolves within the woods, makes me tremble.

I was never in the robbers' cave where Gil-

Blas lived, but I often go back there, and find the trap-door just as heavy to raise as it used to be, while that wicked old disabled Black lies everlastingly cursing in bed. I was never in Don Quixote's study, where he read his books of chivalry until he rose and hacked at imaginary giants, and then refreshed himself with great draughts of water, yet you couldn't move a book in it without my knowledge, or with my consent. I was never (thank Heaven!) in company with the little old woman who hobbled out of the chest, and told the merchant Abudah to go in search of the Talisman of Oromanes, yet I make it my business to know that she is well preserved, and as intolerable as ever. I was never at the school where the boy Horatio Nelson got out of bed to steal the pears; nor because he wanted any, but because every other boy was afraid. yet I have several times been back to this Academy, to see him let down out of window with a sheet. So with Damascus, and Bagdad, and Brobdingnag (which has the curious fate of being usually misspelt when written), and Lilliput, and Laputa, and the Nile, and Abyssinia, and the Ganges, and the North Pole, and many hundreds of places—I was never at them, yet it is an affair of my life to keep them intact, and I am always going back to them.

But, when I was in Dullborough one day, revisiting the associations of my childhood, as recorded in previous pages of these notes, my experience in this wise was made quite considerable and of no account, by the quantity of places and people—utterly impossible places and people, but none the less alarmingly real—that I found I had been introduced to by my nurse before I was six years old, and used to be forced to go back to at night without at all wanting to go. If we all knew our own minds (in a more enlarged sense than the popular acceptance of that phrase), I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back to against our wills.

The first diabolical character who intruded himself on my peaceful youth (as I called to mind that day at Dullborough) was a certain Captain Murderer. This wretch must have been an offshoot of the Blue Beard family, but I had no suspicion of the consanguinity in those times. His warning name would seem to have awakened no general prejudice against him, for he was admitted into the best society, and possessed immense wealth. Captain Murderer's mission was matrimony, and the gratification of a cannibal appetite with tender brides. On his marriage morning, he always caused both sides of the way to church to be planted with curious flowers;

and when his bride said, "Dear Captain Murderer, I never saw flowers like these before: what are they called?" he answered, "They are called Garnish for house-lamb," and laughed at his ferocious practical joke in a horrid manner, disquieting the minds of the noble bridal company, with a very sharp show of teeth, then displayed for the first time. He made love in a coach and six, and married in a coach and twelve, and all his horses were milk-white horses with one red spot on the back, which he caused to be hidden by the harness. For, the spot *would* come there, though every horse was milk-white when Captain Murderer bought him. And the spot was young bride's blood. (To this terrific point I am indebted for my first personal experience of a shudder and cold beads on the forehead.) When Captain Murderer had made an end of feasting and revelry, and had dismissed the noble guests, and was alone with his wife on the day month after their marriage, it was his whimsical custom to produce a golden rolling-pin and a silver pie-board. Now, there was this special feature in the Captain's courtships, that he always asked if the young lady could make pie-crust, and, if she couldn't by nature or education, she was taught. Well! When the bride saw Captain Murderer produce the golden rolling-pin and silver pie-board, she remembered this, and turned up her laced-silk sleeves to make a pie. The Captain brought out a silver piedish of immense capacity, and the Captain brought out flour and butter and eggs and all things needful, except the inside of the pie; of materials for the staple of the pie itself, the Captain brought out none. Then said the lovely bride, "Dear Captain Murderer, what pie is this to be?" He replied, "A meat-pie." Then said the lovely bride, "Dear Captain Murderer, I see no meat." The Captain humorously retorted, "Look in the glass." She looked in the glass, but still she saw no meat, and then the Captain roared with laughter, and, suddenly frowning and drawing his sword, bade her roll out the crust. So she rolled 'out the crust, dropping large tears upon it all the time because he was so cross, and when she had lined the dish with crust, and had cut the crust all ready to fit the top, the Captain called out, "I see the meat in the glass!" And the bride looked up at the glass, just in time to see the Captain cutting her head off: and he chopped her in pieces, and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker's, and ate it all, and picked the bones.

Captain Murderer went on in this way, prospering exceedingly, until he came to choose a

bride from two twin sisters, and at first didn't know which to choose. For, though one was fair, and the other dark, they were both equally beautiful. But the fair twin loved him, and the dark twin hated him, so he chose the fair one. The dark twin would have prevented the marriage if she could, but she couldn't; however, on the night before it, much suspecting Captain Murderer, she stole out and climbed his garden wall, and looked in at his window through a chink in the shutter, and saw him having his teeth filed sharp. Next day she listened all day, and heard him make his joke about the house-lamb. And that day month he had the paste rolled out, and cut the fair twin's head off, and chopped her in pieces and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker's, and ate it all, and picked the bones.

Now, the dark twin had had her suspicions much increased by the filing of the Captain's teeth, and again by the house-lamb joke. Putting all things together when he gave out that her sister was dead, she divined the truth, and determined to be revenged. So, she went up to Captain Murderer's house, and knocked at the knocker, and pulled at the bell, and, when the Captain came to the door, said: "Dear Captain Murderer, marry me next, for I always loved you, and was jealous of my sister." The Captain took it as a compliment, and made a polite answer, and the marriage was quickly arranged. On the night before it, the bride again climbed to his window, and again saw him having his teeth filed sharp. At this sight she laughed such a terrible laugh at the chink in the shutter, that the Captain's blood curdled, and he said: "I hope nothing has disagreed with me!" At that, she laughed again, a still more terrible laugh, and the shutter was opened and search made, but she was nimbly gone, and there was no one. Next day they went to church in a coach and twelve, and were married. And that day month she rolled the pie-crust out, and Captain Murderer cut her head off, and chopped her in pieces, and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker's, and ate it all, and picked the bones.

But, before she began to roll out the paste, she had taken a deadly poison of a most awful character, distilled from toads' eyes and spiders' knees; and Captain Murderer had hardly picked her last bone, when he began to swell, and to turn blue, and to be all over spots, and to scream. And he went on swelling and turning bluer, and being more all over spots and screaming, until he reached from floor to ceiling, and from wall

to wall; and then, at one o'clock in the morning, he blew up with a loud explosion. At the sound of it, all the milk-white horses in the stables broke their halters and went mad, and then they galloped over everybody in Captain Murderer's house (beginning with the family blacksmith who had filed his teeth) until the whole were dead, and then they galloped away.

Hundreds of times did I hear this legend of Captain Murderer in my early youth, and added hundreds of times was there a mental compulsion upon me, in bed, to peep in at his window as the dark twin peeped, and to revisit his horrible house, and look at him in his blue and spotty and screaming stage, as he reached from floor to ceiling, and from wall to wall. The young woman who brought me acquainted with Captain Murderer had a fiendish enjoyment of my terrors, and used to begin, I remember—as a sort of introductory overture—by clawing the air with both hands, and uttering a long low hollow groan. So acutely did I suffer from this ceremony in combination with this infernal Captain, that I sometimes used to plead, I thought I was hardly strong enough and old enough to hear the story again just yet. But, she never spared me one word of it, and, indeed, commended the awful chalice to my lips as the only preservative known to science against "The Black Cat"—a weird and glaring-eyed supernatural Tom, who was reputed to prowls about the world by night, sucking the breath of infancy, and who was endowed with a special thirst (as I was given to understand) for mine.

This female bard—may she have been repaid my debt of obligation to her in the matter of nightmares and perspirations!—reappears in my memory as the daughter of a shipwright. Her name was Mercy, though she had none on me. There was something of a ship-building flavour in the following story. As it always recurs to me in a vague association with calomel pills, I believe it to have been reserved for dull nights when I was low with medicine.

There was once a shipwright, and he wrought in a Government Yard, and his name was Chips. And his father's name before him was Chips, and his father's name before him was Chips, and they were all Chipseys. And Chips the father had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the grandfather had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the great-grandfather had disposed of himself in the same direction on the same terms;

and the bargain had run in the family for a long long time. So, one day, when young Chips was at work in the Dock Slip all alone, down in the dark hold of an old Seventy-four that was haled up for repairs, the Devil presented himself, and remarked:

"A Lemon has pins,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!"

(I don't know why, but this fact of the Devil's expressing himself in rhyme was peculiarly trying to me.) Chips looked up when he heard the words, and there he saw the Devil with saucer eyes that squinted on a terrible great scale, and that struck out sparks of blue fire continually. And, whenever he winked, his eyes, showers of blue sparks came out, and his eyelashes made a clattering like flints and steels striking lights. And hanging over one of his arms by the handle was an iron pot, and under that arm was a bushel of tenpenny nails, and under his other arm was half a ton of copper, and sitting on one of his shoulders was a rat that could speak. So, the Devil said again:

"A Lemon has pins,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!"

(The invariable effect of this alarming tautology on the part of the Evil Spirit was to deprive me of my senses for some moments.) So, Chips answered never a word, but went on with his work. "What are you doing, Chips?" said the rat that could speak. "I am putting in new planks where you and your gang have eaten old away," said Chips. "But we'll eat them too," said the rat that could speak; "and we'll let in the water and drown the crew, and we'll eat them too." Chips, being only a shipwright, and not a Man-of-war's man, said, "You are welcome to it." But he couldn't keep his eyes off the half a ton of copper, or the bushel of tenpenny nails; for nails and copper are a shipwright's sweethearts, and shipwrights will run away with them whenever they can. So, the Devil said, "I see what you are looking at, Chips. You had better strike the bargain. You know the terms. Your father before you was well acquainted with them, and so were your grandfather and great-grandfather before him." Says Chips, "I like the copper, and I like the nails, and I don't mind the pot, but I don't like the rat." Says the Devil fiercely, "You can't have the metal without him—and he's a curiosity. I'm going." Chips, afraid of losing the

half a ton of copper and the bushel of nails, then said, "Give us hold!" So, he got the copper and the nails and the pot and the rat that could speak, and the Devil vanished. Chips sold the copper, and he sold the nails, and he would have sold the pot; but, whenever he offered it for sale, the rat was in it, and the dealers dropped it, and would have nothing to say to the bargain. So, Chips resolved to kill the rat, and being at work in the Yard one day with a great kettle of hot pitch on one side of him, and the iron pot

with the rat in it on the other, he turned the scalding pitch into the pot, and filled it full. Then, he kept his eye upon it till it cooled and hardened, and then he let it stand for twenty days, and then he heated the pitch again, and turned it back into the kettle, and then he sank the pot in water for twenty days more, and then he got the smelters to put it in the furnace for twenty days more, and then they gave it him out, red-hot, and looking like red-hot glass instead of iron—yet there was the rat in it, just



"A LEMON HAS PIPS, AND A YARD HAS SHIPS, AND I'LL HAVE CHIPS!"

the same as ever! And the moment it caught his eye, it said with a jeer:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!"

(For this Refrain I had waited, since its last appearance, with inexpressible horror, which now culminated.) Chips now felt certain in his own mind that the rat would stick to him; the rat, answering his thought, said, "I will—like pitch!"

Now, as the rat leaped out of the pot when it had spoken, and made off, Chips began to hope that it wouldn't keep its word. But, a terrible thing happened next day. For, when dinner-time came, and the Dock bell rang to strike work, he put his rule into the long pocket at the side of his trousers, and there he found a rat—not that rat, but another rat. And in his hat he found another; and in his pocket-handkerchief another; and in the sleeves of his coat, when he pulled it on to go to dinner, two more. And

from that time he found himself so frightfully intimate with all the rats in the Yard, that they climbed up his legs when he was at work, and sat on his tools while he used them. And they could all speak to one another, and he understood what they said. And they got into his lodging, and into his bed, and into his teapot, and into his beer, and into his boots. And he was going to be married to a corn-chandler's daughter; and when he gave her a workbox he had himself made for her, a rat jumped out of it; and when he put his arm round her waist, a rat clung about her; so the marriage was broken off, though the banns were already twice put up—which the parish clerk well remembers, for, as he handed the book to the clergyman for the second time of asking, a large fat rat ran over the leaf. (By this time a special cascade of rats was rolling down my back, and the whole of my small listening person was overrun with them. At intervals ever since, I have been morbidly afraid of my own pocket, lest my exploring hand should find a specimen or two of those vermin in it.)

You may believe that all this was very terrible to Chips; but even all this was not the worst. He knew, besides, what the rats were doing, wherever they were. So, sometimes he would cry aloud, when he was at his club at night, "Oh! Keep the rats out of the convicts' burying-ground! Don't let them do that!" Or, "There's one of them at the cheese downstairs!" Or, "There's two of them smelling at the baby in the garret!" Or, other things of that sort. At last he was voted mad, and lost his work in the Yard, and could get no other work. But, King George wanted men, so before very long he got pressed for a sailor. And so he was taken off in a boat one evening to his ship, lying at Spithead, ready to sail. And so the first thing he made out in her, as he got near her, was the figure-head of the old Seventy-four, where he had seen the Devil. She was called the Argonaut, and they rowed right under the bowsprit, where the figure-head of the Argonaut, with a sheep-skin in his hand and a blue gown on, was looking out to sea; and sitting staring on his forehead was the rat who could speak, and his exact words were these: "Chips ahoy! Old boy! We've pretty well eat them too, and we'll drown the crew, and will eat them too!" (Here I always became exceedingly faint, and would have asked for water, but that I was speechless.)

The ship was bound for the Indies; and, if you don't know where that is, you ought to it, and angels will never love you. (Here I felt

myself an outcast from a future state.) The ship set sail that very night, and she sailed, and sailed, and sailed. Chips's feelings were dreadful. Nothing ever equalled his terrors. No wonder. At last, one day, he asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. Chips went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Your Honour, unless your Honour, without a moment's loss of time, makes sail for the nearest shore, this is a doomed ship, and her name is the Coffin!" "Young man, your words are a madman's words." "Your Honour, no; they are nibbling us away." "They?" "Your Honour, them dreadful rats. Dust and hollowness where solid oak ought to be! Rats nibbling a grave for every man on board! Oh! Does your Honour love your Lady and your pretty children?" "Yes, my man, to be sure." "Then, for God's sake, make for the nearest shore, for at this present moment the rats are all stopping in their work, and are all looking straight towards you with bare teeth, and are all saying to one another that you shall never, never, never see your Lady and your children more." "My poor fellow, you are a case for the doctor. Sentry, take care of this man!"

So, he was bled and he was blistered, and he was this and that, for six whole days and nights. So, then he again asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. He went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Now, Admiral, you must die! You took no warning: you must die! The rats are never wrong in their calculations, and they make out that they'll be through at twelve to-night. So, you must die!—With me and all the rest!" And so at twelve o'clock there was a great leak reported in the ship, and a torrent of water rushed in, and nothing could stop it, and they all went down, every living soul. And what the rats—being water-rats—left of Chips at last floated to shore, and sitting on him was an immense overgrown rat, laughing, that dived when the corpse touched the beach, and never came up. And there was a deal of seaweed on the remains. And if you get thirteen bits of seaweed, and dry them, and burn them in the fire, they will go off like in these thirteen words as plain as plain can be:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!"

The same female bard—descended, possibly, from those terrible old scalds who seem to have existed for the express purpose of adding the brains of mankind when they begin to investi-

gate languages—made a standing pretence which greatly assisted in forcing me back to a number of hideous places that I would by all means have avoided. This pretence was, that all her ghost stories had occurred to her own relations. Politeness towards a meritorious family, therefore, forbade my doubting them, and they acquired an air of authentication that impaired my digestive powers for life. There was a narrative concerning an unearthly animal foreboding death, which appeared in the open street to a parlour-maid who “went to fetch the beer” for supper: first (as I now recall it) assuming the likeness of a black dog, and gradually rising on its hind-legs, and swelling into the semblance of some quadruped greatly surpassing a hippopotamus: which apparition—not because I deemed it in the least improbable, but because I felt it to be really too large to bear—I feebly endeavoured to explain away. But, on Mercy’s retorting with wounded dignity that the parlour-maid was her own sister-in-law, I perceived there was no hope, and resigned myself to this zoological phenomenon as one of my many pursuers. There was another narrative describing the apparition of a young woman who came out of a glass case, and haunted another young woman until the other young woman questioned it, and elicited that its bones (Lord! To think of its being so particular about its bones!) were buried under the glass case, whereas she required them to be interred, with every Undertaking solemnity up to twenty-four pound ten, in another particular place. This narrative I considered I had a personal interest in disproving, because we had glass cases at home, and how, otherwise, was I to be guaranteed from the intrusion of young women requiring *me* to bury them up to twenty-four pound ten, when I had only twopence a week? But my remorseless nurse cut the ground from under my tender feet, by informing me that She was the other young woman; and I couldn’t say, “I don’t believe you;” it was not possible.

Such are a few of the uncommercial journeys that I was forced to make, against my will, when I was very young and unreasoning. And really, as to the latter part of them, it is not so very long ago—now I come to think of it—that I was asked to undertake them once again with a steady countenance.

XVI.

ARCADIAN LONDON.

BEING in a humour for complete solitude and uninterrupted meditation this autumn, I have taken a lodging for six weeks in the most unfrequented part of England—in a word, in London.

The retreat into which I have withdrawn myself is Bond Street. From this lonely spot I make pilgrimages into the surrounding wilderness, and traverse extensive tracts of the Great Desert. The first solemn feeling of isolation overcome, the first oppressive consciousness of profound retirement conquered, I enjoy that sense of freedom, and feel reviving within me that latent wildness of the original savage, which has been (upon the whole, somewhat frequently) noticed by Travellers.

My lodgings are at a hatter’s—my own hatter’s. After exhibiting no articles in his window, for some weeks, but seaside wide-awakes, shooting caps, and a choice of rough waterproof head-gear for the moors and mountains, he has put upon the heads of his family as much of this stock as they could carry, and has taken them off to the Isle of Thanet. His young man alone remains—and remains alone—in the shop. The young man has let out the fire at which the irons are heated, and saving his strong sense of duty, I see no reason why he should take the shutters down.

Happily for himself and for his country, the young man is a Volunteer; most happily for himself, or I think he would become the prey of a settled melancholy. For, to live surrounded by human hats, and alienated from human heads to fit them on, is surely a great endurance. But, the young man, sustained by practising his exercise, and by constantly refurbishing up his regulation plume (it is unnecessary to observe that, as a hatter, he is in a cock’s-feather corps), is resigned, and uncomplaining. On a Saturday, when he closes early and gets his Knickerbockers on, he is even cheerful. I am gratefully particular in this reference to him, because he is my companion through many peaceful hours. My hatter has a desk up certain steps behind his counter, enclosed like the clerk’s desk at church. I shut myself into this place of seclusion after breakfast, and meditate. At such times I observe the young man loading an imaginary rifle with the greatest precision, and maintaining a most galling and destructive fire upon the national enemy. I thank him publicly for his companionship and his patriotism.

The simple character of my life, and the calm nature of the scenes by which I am surrounded, occasion me to rise early. I go forth in my slippers, and promenade the pavement. It is pastoral to feel the freshness of the air in the uninhabited town, and to appreciate the shepherdess character of the few milkwomen who purvey so little milk that it would be worth nobody's while to adulterate it, if anybody were left to undertake the task. On the crowded seashore, the great demand for milk, combined with the strong local temptation of chalk, would betray itself in the lowered quality of the article. In Arcadian London I derive it from the cow.

The Arcadian simplicity of the metropolis altogether, and the primitive ways into which it has fallen in this autumnal Golden Age, make it entirely new to me. Within a few hundred yards of my retreat is the house of a friend who maintains a most sumptuous butler. I never, until yesterday, saw that butler out of superfine black broadcloth. Until yesterday I never saw him off duty, never saw him (he is the best of butlers) with the appearance of having any mind for anything but the glory of his master and his master's friends. Yesterday morning, walking in my slippers near the house of which he is the prop and ornament—a house now a waste of shutters—I encountered that butler, also in his slippers, and in a shooting suit of one colour, and in a low-crowned straw hat, smoking an early cigar. He felt that we had formerly met in another state of existence, and that we were translated into a new sphere. Wisely and well, he passed me without recognition. Under his arm he carried the morning paper, and shortly afterwards I saw him sitting on a rail in the pleasant open landscape of Regent Street, perusing it at his ease under the ripening sun.

My landlord having taken his whole establishment to be salted down, I am waited on by an elderly woman labouring under a chronic sniff, who, at the shadowy hour of half-past nine o'clock of every evening, gives admittance at the street-door to a meagre and mouldy old man whom I have never yet seen detached from a flat pint of beer in a pewter pot. The meagre and mouldy old man is her husband, and the pair have a dejected consciousness that they are not justified in appearing on the surface of the earth. They come out of some hole when London empties itself, and go in again when it fills. I saw them arrive on the evening when I myself took possession, and they arrived with the flat pint of beer, and their bed in a bundle. The old man is a weak old man, and appeared to

me to get the bed down the kitchen stairs by tumbling down with and upon it. They make their bed in the lowest and remotest corner of the basement, and they smell of bed, and have no possession but bed: unless it be (which I rather infer from an under-current of flavour in them) cheese. I know their name, through the chance of having called the wife's attention, at half-past nine on the second evening of our acquaintance, to the circumstance of there being some one at the house-door; when she apologetically explained, "It's only Mr. Klem." What becomes of Mr. Klem all day, or when he goes out, or why, is a mystery I cannot penetrate; but at half-past nine he never fails to turn up on the door-step with the flat pint of beer. And the pint of beer, flat as it is, is so much more important than himself, that it always seems to my fancy as if it had found him drivelling in the street, and had humanely brought him home. In making his way below, Mr. Klem never goes down the middle of the passage, like another Christian, but shuffles against the wall, as if entreating me to take notice that he is occupying as little space as possible in the house; and, whenever I come upon him face to face, he backs from me in fascinated confusion. The most extraordinary circumstance I have traced, in connection with this aged couple, is, that there is a Miss Klem, their daughter, apparently ten years older than either of them, who has also a bed, and smells of it, and carries it about the earth at dusk, and hides it in deserted houses. I came into this piece of knowledge through Mrs. Klem's beseeching me to sanction the sheltering of Miss Klem under that roof for a single night, "between her takin' care of the upper part in Pall Mall which the family of his back, and a 'ouse in Serjames Street, which the family of leaves towng ter-morrer." I gave my gracious consent (having nothing that I know of to do with it), and in the shadowy hours Miss Klem became perceptible on the door-step, wrestling with a bed in a bundle. Where she made it up for the night I cannot positively state, but I think, in a sink. I know that, with the instinct of a reptile or an insect, she stowed it and herself away in deep obscurity. In the Klem family I have noticed another remarkable gift of nature, and that is the power they possess of converting everything into flue. Such broken victuals as they take by stealth appear (whatever the nature of the viands) invariably to generate flue; and even the nightly pint of beer, instead of assimilating naturally, strikes me as breaking out in that form, equally on the shabby gown of

Mrs. Klem, and the threadbare coat of her husband.

Mrs. Klem has no idea of my name—as to Mr. Klem he has no idea of anything—and only knows me as her good gentleman. Thus, if doubtful whether I am in my room or no, Mrs. Klem taps at the door and says, “Is my good gentleman here?” Or, if a messenger desiring to see me were consistent with my solitude, she would show him in with “Here is my good gentleman.” I find this to be a generic custom. For, I meant to have observed before now, that in its Arcadian time all my part of London is indistinctly pervaded by the Klem species. They creep about with beds, and go to bed in miles of deserted houses. They hold no companionship, except that sometimes, after dark, two of them will emerge from opposite houses, and meet in the middle of the road as on neutral ground, or will peep from adjoining houses over an interposing barrier of area railings, and compare a few reserved mistrustful notes respecting their good ladies or good gentlemen. This I have discovered in the course of various solitary rambles I have taken Northward from my retirement, along the awful perspectives of Wimpole Street, Harley Street, and similar frowning regions. Their effect would be scarcely distinguishable from that of the primeval forests, but for the Klem stragglers; these may be dimly observed, when the heavy shadows fall, flitting to and fro, putting up the door-chain, taking in the pint of beer, lowering like phantoms at the dark parlour windows, or secretly consorting underground with the dust-bin and the water cistern.

In the Burlington Arcade, I observe, with peculiar pleasure, a primitive state of manners to have superseded the baneful influences of ultra-civilisation. Nothing can surpass the innocence of the ladies’ shoe-shops, the artificial-flower repositories, and the head-dress depôts. They are in strange hands at this time of the year—hands of unaccustomed persons, who are imperfectly acquainted with the prices of the goods, and contemplate them with unsophisticated delight and wonder. The children of these virtuous people exchange familiarities in the Arcade, and temper the asperity of the two tall beadles. Their youthful prattle blends in an unwonted manner with the harmonious shade of the scene, and the general effect is as of the voices of birds in a grove. In this happy restoration of the golden time, it has been my privilege even to see the bigger beadle’s wife. She brought him his dinner in a basin, and he ate it in his arm-chair, and afterwards fell asleep

like a satiated child. At Mr. Truefitt’s, the excellent hairdresser’s, they are learning French to beguile the time; and even the few solitaires left on guard at Mr. Atkinson’s, the perfumer’s round the corner (generally the most inexorable gentleman in London, and the most scornful of three-and-sixpence), condescend a little, as they drowsily bide or recall their turn for chasing the ebbing Neptune on the ribbed sea-sand. From Messrs. Hunt and Rockell’s, the jewellers, all things are absent but the precious stones, and the gold and silver, and the soldierly pensioner at the door with his decorated breast. I might stand night and day, for a month to come, in Saville Row, with my tongue out, yet not find a doctor to look at it for love or money. The dentists’ instruments are rusting in their drawers, and their horrible cool parlours, where people pretend to read the *Every-Day Book*, and not to be afraid, are doing penance for their grimness in white sheets. The light-weight of shrewd appearance, with one eye always shut up, as if he were eating a sharp gooseberry in all seasons, who usually stands at the gateway of the livery stables on very little legs under a very large waistcoat, has gone to Doncaster. Of such undesigning aspect is his guileless yard now, with its gravel and scarlet-beans, and the yellow Brake housed under a glass roof in a corner, that I almost believe I could not be taken in there, if I tried. In the places of business of the great tailors, the cheval-glasses are dim and dusty for lack of being looked into. Ranges of brown-paper coat and waistcoat bodies look as funereal as if they were the hatchments of the customers with whose names they are inscribed; the measuring tapes hang idle on the wall; the order-taker, left on the hopeless chance of some one looking in, yawns in the last extremity over the book of patterns, as if he were trying to read that entertaining library. The hotels in Brook Street have no one in them, and the staffs of servants stare disconsolately for next season out of all the windows. The very man who goes about like an erect Turtle, between two boards commendatory of the *Sixteen-Shilling Trousers*, is aware of himself as a hollow mockery, and eats filberts while he leans his hinder shell against a wall.

Among these tranquillising objects it is my delight to walk and meditate. Soothed by the repose around me, I wander insensibly to considerable distances, and guide myself back by the stars. Thus, I enjoy the contrast of a few still partially inhabited and busy spots, where all the nights are not fled, where all the garlands are not dead, whence all but I have not departed.

Then does it appear to me that in this age three things are clamorously required of Man in the miscellaneous thoroughfares of the metropolis. Firstly, that he have his boots cleaned. Secondly, that he eat a penny ice. Thirdly, that he get himself photographed. Then do I speculate, What have those seam-worn artists been who stand at the photograph doors in Greek caps, sample in hand, and mysteriously salute the public—the female public with a pressing tenderness—to come in and be “took?” What did they do with their greasy blandishments before the era of cheap photography? Of what class were their previous victims, and how victimised? And how did they get, and how did they pay for, that large collection of likenesses, all purporting to have been taken inside, with the taking of none of which had that establishment any more to do than with the taking of Delhi?

But, these are small oases, and I am soon back again in metropolitan Arcadia. It is my impression that much of its serene and peaceful character is attributable to the absence of customary Talk. How do I know but there may be subtle influences in Talk, to vex the souls of men who don't hear it? How do I know but that Talk, five, ten, twenty miles off, may get into the air and disagree with me? If I rise from my bed, vaguely troubled and wearied and sick of my life, in the session of Parliament, who shall say that my noble friend, my right reverend friend, my right honourable friend, my honourable friend, my honourable and learned friend, or my honourable and gallant friend, may not be responsible for that effect upon my nervous system? Too much Ozone in the air, I am informed and fully believe (though I have no idea what it is), would affect me in a marvellously disagreeable way; why may not too much Talk? I don't see or hear the Ozone; I don't see or hear the Talk. And there is so much Talk; so much too much; such loud cry, and such scant supply of wool; such a deal of fleecing, and so little fleece! Hence, in the Arcadian season, I find it a delicious triumph to walk down to deserted Westminster, and see the Courts shut up; to walk a little further, and see the Two Houses shut up; to stand in the Abbey Yard, like the New Zealander of the grand English History (concerning which unfortunate man a whole rookery of mares' nests is generally being discovered), and gloat upon the ruins of Talk. Returning to my primitive solitude, and lying down to sleep, my grateful heart expands with the consciousness that there is no adjourned Debate, no ministerial explanation, nobody to

give notice of intention to ask the noble Lord at the head of her Majesty's Government five-and-twenty bootless questions in one, no term-time with legal argument, no Nisi Prius with eloquent appeal to British Jury; that the air will to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow remain untroubled by this superabundant generating of Talk. In a minor degree it is a delicious triumph to me to go into the club, and see the carpets up, and the Bores and the other dust dispersed to the four winds. Again, New Zealander-like, I stand on the cold hearth, and say in the solitude, “Here I watched Bore A 1, with voice always mysteriously low, and head always mysteriously drooped, whispering political secrets into the ears of Adam's confiding children. Accused be his memory for ever and a day!”

But, I have all this time been coming to the point, that the happy nature of my retirement is most sweetly expressed in its being the abode of Love. It is, as it were, an inexpensive Agape-mone: nobody's speculation: everybody's profit. The one great result of the resumption of primitive habits, and (convertible terms) the not having much to do, is, the abounding of Love.

The Klem species are incapable of the softer emotions; probably, in that low nomadic race, the softer emotions have all degenerated into flue. But, with this exception, all the sharers of my retreat make love.

I have mentioned Saville Row. We all know the Doctor's servant. We all know what a respectable man he is, what a hard dry man, what a firm man, what a confidential man: how he lets us into the waiting-room, like a man who knows minutely what is the matter with us, but from whom the rack should not wring the secret. In the prosaic “season,” he has distinctly the appearance of a man conscious of money in the Savings Bank, and taking his stand on his respectability with both feet. At that time it is as impossible to associate him with relaxation, or any human weakness, as it is to meet his eye without feeling guilty of indisposition. In the blest Arcadian time, how changed! I have seen him in a pepper-and-salt jacket—jacket—and drab trousers, with his arm round the waist of a bootmaker's housemaid, smiling in open day. I have seen him at the pump by the Albany, unsolicitedly pumping for two fair young creatures, whose figures, as they bent over their cans, were—if I may be allowed an original expression—a model for a sculptor. I have seen him trying the piano in the Doctor's drawing-room with his forefinger, and have heard him humming tunes in praise of lovely woman. I have seen him

seated on a fire-engine, and going (obviously in search of excitement) to a fire. I saw him, one moonlight evening, when the peace and purity of our Arcadian west were at their height, polk with the lovely daughter of a cleaner of gloves, from the door-steps of his own residence, across Saville Row, round by Clifford Street and Old Burlington Street, back to Burlington Gardens. Is this the Golden Age revived, or Iron London?

The Dentist's servant. Is that man no mystery to us, no type of invisible power? The tremendous individual knows (who else does?) what is done with the extracted teeth; he knows what goes on in the little room where something is always being washed or filed; he knows what warm spicy infusion is put into the comfortable tumbler from which we rinse our wounded mouth, with a gap in it that feels a foot wide; he knows whether the thing we spit into is a fixture communicating with the Thames, or could be cleared away for a dance; he sees the horrible parlour when there are no patients in it, and he could reveal, if he would, what becomes of the *Every-Day Book* then. The conviction of my coward conscience, when I see that man in a professional light, is, that he knows all the statistics of my teeth and gums, my double teeth, my single teeth, my stopped teeth, and my sound. In this Arcadian rest, I am fearless of him as of a harmless, powerless creature in a Scotch cap, who adores a young lady in a voluminous crinoline, at a neighbouring billiard-room, and whose passion would be uninfluenced if every one of her teeth were false. They may be. He takes them all on trust.

In secluded corners of the place of my seclusion there are little shops withdrawn from public curiosity, and never two together, where servants' perquisites are bought. The cook may dispose of grease at these modest and convenient marts; the butler, of bottles; the valet and lady's-maid, of clothes; most servants, indeed, of most things they may happen to lay hold of. I have been told that in sterner times loving correspondence, otherwise interdicted, may be maintained by letter through the agency of some of these useful establishments. In the Arcadian autumn no such device is necessary. Everybody loves, and openly and blamelessly loves. My landlord's young man loves the whole of one side of the way of Old Bond Street, and is beloved several doors up New Bond Street besides. I never look out of window but I see kissing of hands going on all around me. It is the morning custom to glide from shop to shop, and exchange tender sentiments; it is the evening custom for couples to stand hand-in-hand at

house-doors, or roam, linked in that flowery manner, through the unpeopled streets. There is nothing else to do but love; and what there is to do is done.

In unison with this pursuit, a chaste simplicity obtains in the domestic habits of Arcadia. Its few scattered people dine early, live moderately, sup socially, and sleep soundly. It is rumoured that the Beadles of the Arcade, from being the mortal enemies of boys, have signed with tears an address to Lord Shaftesbury, and subscribed to a ragged school. No wonder! For they might turn their heavy maces into crooks, and tend sheep in the Arcade, to the purting of the water-carts as they give the thirsty streets much more to drink than they can carry.

A happy Golden Age, and a serene tranquillity. Charming picture, but it will fade. The iron age will return; London will come back to town. If I show my tongue then in Saville Row for half a minute, I shall be prescribed for: the Doctor's man and the Dentist's man will then pretend that these days of unprofessional innocence never existed. Where Mr. and Mrs. Klem and their béd will be at that time, passes human knowledge; but my ~~hatter~~ hermitage will then know them no more, nor will it then know me. The desk at which I have written these meditations will retributively assist at the making out of my account, and the wheels of gorgeous carriages and the hoofs of high-stepping horses will crush the silence out of Bond Street—will grind Arcadia away, and give it to the elements in granite powder.

XVII.

THE CALAIS NIGHT MAIL.

IT is an unsettled question with me whether I shall leave Calais something handsome in my will, or whether I shall leave it my malediction. I hate it so much, and yet I am always so very glad to see it, that I am in a state of constant indecision on this subject.

When I first made acquaintance with Calais, it was as a maundering young wretch in a clammy perspiration and dripping saline particles, who was conscious of no extremities but the one great extremity, sea-sickness—who was a mere bilious torso, with a mislaid headache somewhere in its stomach—who had been put into a horrible swing in Dover Harbour, and had tumbled giddily out of it on the French coast,

or the Isle Man, or anywhere. Times have changed, and now I enter Calais self-reliant and rational. I know where it is beforehand, I keep a look-out for it, I recognise its landmarks when I see any of them, I am acquainted with its ways, and I know—and I can bear—its worst behaviour.

Malignant Calais! Low-lying alligator, evading the eyesight and discouraging hope! Dodging flat streak, now on this bow, now on that, now anywhere, now everywhere, now nowhere! In vain Cape Grinez, coming frankly forth into the sea, exhorts the failing to be stout of heart and stomach: sneaking Calais, prone behind its bar, invites emetically to despair. Even when it can no longer quite conceal itself in its muddy dock, it has an evil way of falling off, has Calais, which is more hopeless than its invisibility. The pier is all but on the bowsprit, and you think you are there—roll, roar, wash!—Calais has retired miles inland, and Dover has burst out to look for it. It has a last dip and a slide in its character, has Calais, to be especially commended to the infernal gods. Thrice accused be that garrison town, when it dives under the boat's keel, and comes up a league or two to the right, with the packet shivering and spluttering and staring about for it!

Not but what I have my animosities towards Dover. I particularly detest Dover for the self-complicity with which it goes to bed. It always goes to bed (when I am going to Calais) with a more brilliant display of lamp and candle than any other town. Mr. and Mrs. Birmingham, host and hostess of the Lord Warden Hotel, are my much-esteemed friends, but they are too conceited about the comforts of that establishment when the Night Mail is starting. I know it is a good house to stay at, and I don't want the fact insisted upon in all its warm bright windows at such an hour. I know the Warden is a stationary edifice that never rolls or pitches, and I object to its big outline seeming to insist upon that circumstance; and, as it were, to come over me with it, when I am reeling on the deck of the boat. Beshrew the Warden, likewise, for obstructing that corner, and making the wind so angry as it rushes round. Shall I not know that it blows quite soon enough, without the officious Warden's interference?

As I wait here, on board the night packet, for the South-Eastern Train to come down with the Mail, Dover appears to me to be illuminated for some intensely aggravating festivity in my personal dishonour. All its noises smack of taunting praises of the land, and dispraises of the gloomy sea, and of me for going on it. The

drums upon the heights have gone to bed, or I know they would rattle taunts against me for having my unsteady footing on this slippery deck. The many gas eyes of the Marine Parade twinkle in an offensive manner, as if with derision. The distant dogs of Dover bark at me in my misshapen wrappers, as if I were Richard the Third.

A screech, a bell, and two red eyes come gliding down the Admiralty Pier with a smoothness of motion rendered more smooth by the heaving of the boat. The sea makes noises against the pier, as if several hippopotami were lapping at it, and were prevented by circumstances over which they had no control from drinking peaceably. We, the boat, become violently agitated—rumble, hum, scream, roar, and establish an immense family washing-day at each paddle-box. Bright patches break out in the train as the doors of the post-office vans are opened, and instantly stooping figures with sacks upon their backs begin to be beheld among the piles, descending, as it would seem, in ghostly procession, to Davy Jones's Locker. The passengers come on board; a few shadowy Frenchmen, with hat-boxes shaped like the stoppers of gigantic case-bottles; a few shadowy Germans in immense fur coats and boots; a few shadowy Englishmen prepared for the worst; and pretending not to expect it. I cannot disguise from my uncommercial mind the miserable fact that we are a body of outcasts; that the attendants on us are as scant in number as may serve to get rid of us with the least possible delay; that there are no night loungers interested in us; that the unwilling lamps shiver and shudder at us; that the sole object is to commit us to the deep and abandon us. Lo, the two red eyes glaring in increasing distance, and then the very train itself has gone to bed before we are off!

What is the moral support derived by some sea-going amateurs from an umbrella? Why do certain voyagers across the Channel always put up that article, and hold it up with a grim and fierce tenacity? A fellow-creature near me—whom I only know to be a fellow-creature because of his umbrella: without which he might be a dark bit of cliff, pier, or bulk-head—clutches that instrument with a desperate grasp, that will not relax until he lands at Calais. Is there any analogy, in certain constitutions, between keeping an umbrella up, and keeping the spirits up? A hawser thrown on board with a flop replies, "Stand by!" "Stand by, below!" "Half a turn ahead!" "Half a turn ahead!" "Half speed!" "Half speed!" "Port!" "Port!" "Steady!" "Steady!" "Go on!" "Go on!"

A stout wooden wedge driven in at my right temple and out at my left, a floating deposit of lukewarm oil in my throat, and a compression of the bridge of my nose in a blunt pair of pincers,—these are the personal sensations by which I know we are off, and by which I shall continue to know it until I am on the soil of France. My—symptoms have scarcely established themselves comfortably, when two or three skating shadows, that have been trying to

walk or stand, get flung together, and other two or three shadows in tarpaulin slide with them into corners, and cover them up. Then the South Foreland lights begin to hiccup at us in a way that bodes no good.

It is about this period that my detestation of Calais knows no bounds. Inwardly I resolve afresh that I never will forgive that hated town. I have done so before, many times, but that is past. Let me register a vow. Implacable ani-



"THE WIND BLOWS STIFFLY FROM THE NOR'-EAST, . . . AND THE SHAPELESS PASSENGERS LIE ABOUT IN MELANCHOLY BUNDLES."

mosity to Calais ever— That was an awkward sea, and the funnel seems of my opinion, for it gives a complaining roar.

The wind blows stiffly from the Nor'-East, the sea runs high, we ship a deal of water, the night is dark and cold, and the shapeless passengers lie about in melancholy bundles, as if they were sorted out for the laundress; but, for my own uncommercial part, I cannot pretend that I am much inconvenienced by any of these things. A general howling whistling flopping gurgling

and scooping, I am aware of, and a general knocking about of Nature; but the impressions I receive are very vague. In a sweet faint temper, something like the smell of damaged oranges, I think I should feel languidly benevolent if I had time. I have not time, because I am under a curious compulsion to occupy myself with the Irish melodies. "Rich and rare were the gems she wore," is the particular melody to which I find myself devoted. I sing it to myself in the most charming manner, and with the greatest

expression. Now and then I raise my head (I am sitting on the hardest of wet seats, in the most uncomfortable of wet attitudes, but I don't mind it), and notice that I am a whirling shuttlecock between a fiery battledore of a lighthouse on the French coast, and a fiery battledore of a lighthouse on the English coast; but I don't notice it particularly, except to feel envenomed in my hatred of Calais. Then I go on again, "Rich and rare were the ge-ems she-e-e wore, And a bright gold ring on her wa-and she bore, But O her beauty was fa-a-a-r beyond"—I am particularly proud of my execution here, when I become aware of another awkward shock from the sea, and another protest from the funnel, and a fellow-creature at the paddle-box more audibly indisposed than I think he need be—"Her sparkling gems, or snow-white wand, But O her beauty was fa-a-a-r beyond"—another awkward one here, and the fellow-creature with the umbrella down and picked up—"Her spa-a-r-king ge-ems, or her Port! port! steady! steady! snow-white fellow-creature at the paddle-box very selfishly audible, bump roar wash white wand."

As my execution of the Irish melodies partakes of my imperfect perceptions of what is going on around me, so what is going on around me becomes something else than what it is. The stokers open the furnace doors below, to feed the fires, and I am again on the box of the old Exeter Telegraph fast coach, and that is the light of the for-ever-extinguished coach lamps, and the gleam on the hatches and paddle-boxes is *their* gleam on cottages and haystacks, and the monotonous noise of the engines is the steady jingle of the splendid team. Anon, the intermittent funnel roar of protest at every violent roll becomes the regular blast of a high-pressure engine, and I recognise the exceedingly explosive steamer in which I ascended the Mississippi when the American civil war was not, and when only its causes were. A fragment of mast on which the light of a lantern falls, an end of rope, and a jerking block or so, become suggestive of Franconi's Circus at Paris, where I shall be this very night mayhap (for it must be morning now), and they dance to the selfsame time and tune as the trained steed, Black Raven. What may be the speciality of these waves as they come rushing on, I cannot desert the pressing demands made upon me by the gems she wore to inquire, but they are charged with something about Robinson Crusoe, and I think it was in Yarmouth Roads that he first went a seafaring, and was near foundering (what a terrific sound that word had for me when I was a boy!) in his first gale of wind. Still, through all this, I must ask

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her (who *was* she I wonder?) for the fiftieth time, and without ever stopping, Does she not fear to stray, So lone and lovely through this bleak way, And are Erin's sons so good or so cold, As not to be tempted by more fellow-creatures at the paddle-box or gold? Sir Knight I feel not the least alarm, No son of Erin will offer me harm, For though they love fellow-creature with umbrella down again and golden store, Sir Knight they what a tremendous one love honour and virtue more: For though they love Stewards with a bull's eye bright, they'll trouble you for your ticket, sir—rough passage to-night!

I freely admit it to be a miserable piece of human weakness and inconsistency, but I no sooner become conscious of those last words from the steward than I begin to soften towards Calais. Whereas I have been vindictively wishing that those Calais burghers who came out of their town by a short cut into the History of England, with those fatal ropes round their necks by which they have since been towed into so many cartoons, had all been hanged on the spot, I now begin to regard them as highly respectable and virtuous tradesmen. Looking about me, I see the light of Cape Grinez well astern of the boat-on the davits to leeward, and the light of Calais Harbour undeniably at its old tricks, but still ahead and shining. Sentiments of forgiveness of Calais, not to say of attachment to Calais, begin to expand my bosom. I have weak notions that I will stay there a day or two on my way back. A faded and recumbent stranger, pausing in a profound reverie over the rim of a basin, asked me what kind of place Calais is? I tell him (Heaven forgive me!) a very agreeable place indeed—rather hilly than otherwise.

So strangely goes the time, and, on the whole, so quickly—though still I seem to have been on board a week—that I am bumped rolled gurgled washed and pitched into Calais Harbour before her maiden smile has finally lighted her through the Green Isle, When blest for ever is she who relied, On entering Calais at the top of the tide. For we have not to land to-night down among those slimy timbers—covered with green hair as if it were the mermaids' favourite combing-place—where one crawls to the surface of the jetty like a stranded shrimp, but we go steaming up the harbour to the Railway Station Quay. And as we go, the sea washes in and out among piles and planks, with dead heavy beats, and in quite a furious manner (whereof we are proud), and the lamps shake in the wind, and the bells of Calais striking One seem to send their vibrations struggling against troubled air, as we have come struggling against troubled water. And

now, in the sudden relief and wiping of faces, everybody on board seems to have had a prodigious double tooth out, and to be this very instant free of the Dentist's hands. And now we all know, for the first time, how wet and cold we are, and how salt we are; and now I love Calais with my heart of hearts!

"Hôtel Dessin!" (but in this one case it is not a vocal cry; it is but a bright lustre in the eyes of the cheery representative of that best of inns). "Hôtel Meurice!" "Hôtel de France!" "Hôtel de Calais!" "The Royal Hôtel, sir, Angaishé ouse!" "You going to Parry, sir?" "Your baggage, registair froo, sir?" Bless ye, my Touters, bless ye, my commissionaires, bless ye, my hungry-eyed mysteries in caps of a military form, who are always here, day or night, fair weather or foul, seeking inscrutable jobs which I never see you get! Bless ye, my Custom-House officers in green and grey; permit me to grasp the welcome hands that descend into my travelling bag, one on each side, and meet at the bottom to give my change of linen a peculiar shake up, as if it were a measure of chaff or grain! I have nothing to declare, Monsieur le Douanier, except that, when I cease to breathe, Calais will be found written on my heart. No article liable to local duty have I with me, Monsieur l'Officier de l'Octroi, unless the overflowing of a breast devoted to your charming town should be in that wise chargeable. Ah! see at the gangway by the twinkling lantern, my dearest brother and friend, he once of the Passport Office, he who collects the names! May he be for ever changeless in his buttoned black surtout, with his note-book in his hand, and his tall black hat surmounting his round smiling patient face! Let us embrace, my dearest brother. I am yours à tout jamais—for the whole of ever.

Calais up and doing at the railway station, and Calais down and dreaming in its bed; Calais with something of "an ancient fish-like smell" about it, and Calais blown and sea-washed pure; Calais represented at the Buffet by savoury roast fowls, hot coffee, cognac, and bordeaux; and Calais represented everywhere by flitting persons with a monomania for changing money—though I never shall be able to understand, in my present state of existence, how they live by it, but I suppose I should, if I understood the currency question—Calais *en gros*, and Calais *en détail*, forgive one who has deeply wronged you.—I was not fully aware of it on the other side, but I meant Dover.

Ding, ding! To the carriages, gentlemen the travellers. Ascend then, gentlemen the travellers, for Hazebroucke, Lille, Douai, Bruxelles,

Arras, Amiens, and Paris! I, humble representative of the uncommercial interest, ascend with the rest. The train is light to-night, and I share my compartment with but two fellow-travellers; one, a compatriot in an obsolete cravat, who thinks it a quite unaccountable thing that they don't keep "London time" on a French railway, and who is made angry by my modestly suggesting the possibility of Paris time being more in their way; the other, a young priest, with a very small bird in a very small cage, who feeds the small bird with a quill, and then puts him up in the network above his head, where he advances twittering to his front wires, and seems to address me in an electioneering manner. The compatriot (who crossed in the boat, and whom I judge to be some person of distinction, as he was shut up, like a stately species of rabbit, in a private hutch on deck) and the young priest (who joined us at Calais) are soon asleep, and then the bird and I have it all to ourselves.

A stormy night still; a night that sweeps the wires of the electric telegraph with a wild and fitful hand; a night so very stormy, with the added storm of the train-progress through it, that when the Guard comes clambering round to mark the tickets while we are at full speed (a really horrible performance in an express train, though he holds on to the open window by his elbows in the most deliberate manner), he stands in such a whirlwind that I grip him fast by the collar, and feel it next to manslaughter to let him go. Still, when he is gone, the small small bird remains at his front wires feebly twittering to me—twittering and twittering, until, leaning back in my place, and looking at him in drowsy fascination, I find that he seems to jog my memory as we rush along.

Uncommercial travels (thus the small small bird) have lain in their idle thriftless way through all this range of swamp and dyke, as through many other odd places; and about here, as you very well know, are the queer old stone farmhouses, approached by drawbridges, and the windmills that you get at by boats. Here are the lands where the women hoe and dig, paddling canoe-wise from field to field, and here are the cabarets and other peasant houses where the stone dovecotes in the littered yards are as strong as warders' towers in old castles. Here are the long monotonous miles of canal, with the great Dutch-built barges garishly painted, and the towing girls, sometimes harnessed by the forehead, sometimes by the girdle and the shoulders, not a pleasant sight to see. Scattered through this country are mighty works of VAUBAN, whom you know about

and regiments of such corporals as you heard of once upon a time, and many a blue-eyed Bebelles. Through these flat districts, in the shining summer days, walk those long grotesque files of young novices in enormous shovel hats, whom you remember blackening the ground chequered by the avenues of leafy trees. And now that Haze-broucke slumbers certain kilometres ahead, recall the summer evening when your dusty feet, strolling up from the station, tended hap-hazard to a fair there, where the oldest inhabitants were circling round and round a barrel-organ on hobby-horses with the greatest gravity, and where the principal show in the fair was a Religious Richardson's—literally, on its own announcement in great letters, *THEATRE RELIGIEUX*. In which improving Temple the dramatic representation was of "all the interesting events in the life of our Lord, from the Manger to the Tomb;" the principal female character, without any reservation or exception, being, at the moment of your arrival, engaged in trimming the external Moderators (as it was growing dusk), while the next principal female character took the money, and the Young St. John disported himself upside down on the platform.

Looking up at this point to confirm the small small bird in every particular he has mentioned, I find he has ceased to twitter, and has put his head under his wing. Therefore, in my different way, I follow the good example.

XVIII.

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF MORTALITY.

I HAD parted from the small bird at somewhere about four o'clock in the morning, when he had got out at Arras, and had been received by two shovel hats in waiting at the station, who presented an appropriately ornithological and crow-like appearance.

My compatriot and I had gone on to Paris; my compatriot enlightening me occasionally with a long list of the enormous grievances of French railway travelling: every one of which, as I am a sinner, was perfectly new to me, though I have as much experience of French railways as most uncommercialists. I had left him at the terminus (through his conviction, against all explanation and remonstrance, that his baggage ticket was his passenger ticket), insisting in a very high temper, to the functionary on duty, that in his own personal identity he

was four packages weighing so many kilogrammes—as if he had been Cassim Baba! I had bathed and breakfasted, and was strolling on the bright quays. The subject of my meditations was the question whether it is positively in the essence and nature of things, as a certain school of Britons would seem to think it, that a Capital must be ensnared and enslaved before it can be made beautiful: when I lifted up my eyes, and found that my feet, straying like my mind, had brought me to Notre-Dame.

That is to say, Notre-Dame was before me, but there was a large open space between us. A very little while gone, I had left that space covered with buildings densely crowded; and now it was cleared for some new wonder in the way of public Street, Place, Garden, Fountain, or all four. Only the obscene little Morgue, slinking on the brink of the river, and soon to come down, was left there, looking mortally ashamed of itself, and supremely wicked. I had but glanced at this old acquaintance, when I beheld an airy procession coming round in front of Notre-Dame, past the great hospital. It had something of a Masaniello look, with fluttering striped curtains in the midst of it, and it came dancing round the cathedral in the liveliest manner.

I was speculating on a marriage in Blouse-life, or a Christening, or some other domestic festivity which I would see out, when I found, from the talk of a quick rush of Blouses past me, that it was a Body coming to the Morgue. Having never before chanced upon this initiation, I constituted myself a Blouse likewise, and ran into the Morgue with the rest. It was a very muddy day, and we took in a quantity of mire with us, and the procession, coming in upon our heels, brought a quantity more. The procession was in the highest spirits, and consisted of idlers who had come with the curtained litter from its starting-place, and of all the reinforcements it had picked up by the way. It set the litter down in the midst of the Morgue, and then two Custodians proclaimed aloud that we were all "invited" to go out. This invitation was rendered the more pressing, if not the more flattering, by our being shoved out, and the folding gates being barred upon us.

Those who have never seen the Morgue may see it perfectly, by presenting to themselves an indifferently-paved coach-house, accessible from the street by a pair of folding-gates; on the left of the coach-house, occupying its width, any large London tailor's or linendraper's plate-glass window reaching to the ground; within the window, on two rows of inclined planes, what

the coach-house has to show; hanging above, like irregular stalactites from the roof of a cave, a quantity of clothes—the clothes of the dead-and-buried shows of the coach-house.

We had been excited in the highest degree by seeing the Custodians pull off their coats and tuck up their shirt-sleeves as the procession came along. It looked so interestingly like business. Shut out in the muddy street, we now became quite ravenous to know all about it. Was it river, pistol, knife, love, gambling, robbery, hatred, how many stabs, how many bullets, fresh or decomposed, suicide or murder? All wedged together, and all staring at one another with our heads thrust forward, we propounded these inquiries, and a hundred more such. Imperceptibly it came to be known that Monsieur the tall and sallow mason yonder was acquainted with the facts. Would Monsieur the tall and sallow mason, surged at by a new wave of us, have the goodness to impart? It was but a poor old man, passing along the street under one of the new buildings, on whom a stone had fallen, and who had tumbled dead. His age? Another wave surged up against the tall and sallow mason, and our wave swept on and broke, and he was any age from sixty-five to ninety.

An old man was not much: moreover, we could have wished he had been killed by human agency—his own, or somebody else's: the latter preferable—but our comfort was that he had nothing about him to lead to his identification, and that his people must seek him here. Perhaps they were waiting dinner for him even now? We liked that. Such of us as had pocket-handkerchiefs took a slow, intense, protracted wipe at our noses, and then crammed our handkerchiefs into the breast of our blouses. Others of us who had no handkerchiefs administered a similar relief to our overwrought minds, by means of prolonged smears or wipes of our mouths on our sleeves. One man with a gloomy malformation of brow—a homicidal worker in white-lead, to judge from his blue tone of colour, and a certain flavour of paralysis pervading him—got his coat collar between his teeth, and bit at it with an appetite. Several decent women arrived upon the outskirts of the crowd, and prepared to launch themselves into the dismal coach-house when opportunity should come; among them, a pretty young mother, pretending to bite the forefinger of her baby boy, kept it between her rosy lips that it might be handy for guiding to point at the show. Meantime, all faces were turned towards the building, and we men waited with a fixed and stern resolution: for the most part with folded arms. Sur, it was the only public

French sight these uncommercial eyes had seen, at which the expectant people did not form *en queue*. But there was no such order of arrangement here; nothing but a general determination to make a rush for it, and a disposition to object to some boys who had mounted on the two stone posts by the hinges of the gates, with the design of swooping in when the hinges should turn.

Now they turned, and we rushed! Great pressure, and a scream or two from the front. Then a laugh or two, some expressions of disappointment, and a slackening of the pressure and subsidence of the struggle.—Old man not there.

“But what would you have?” the Custodian reasonably argues as he looks out at his little door. “Patience, patience! We make his toilet, gentlemen. He will be exposed presently. It is necessary to proceed according to rule. His toilet is not made all at a blow. He will be exposed in good time, gentlemen, in good time.” And so retires, smoking, with a wave of his sleeveless arm towards the window, importing, “Entertain yourselves meanwhile with the other curiosities. Fortunately the Museum is not empty to-day.”

Who would have thought of public fickleness even at the Morgue? But there it was on that occasion. Three lately popular articles, that had been attracting greatly when the litter was first desecrated coming dancing round the corner by the great cathedral, were so completely deposited now, that nobody save two little girls (one showing them to a doll) would look at them. Yet the chief of the three, the article in the front row, had received jagged injury of the left temple; and the other two in the back row, the drowned two lying side by side with their heads very slightly turned towards each other, seemed to be comparing notes about it. Indeed, those two of the back row were so furtive of appearance, and so (in their puffed way) assassinatingly knowing as to the one of the front, that it was hard to think the three had never come together in their lives, and were only chance companions after death. Whether or no this was the general, as it was the uncommercial, fancy, it is not to be disputed that the group had drawn exceedingly within ten minutes. Yet now the inconstant public turned its back upon them, and even leaned its elbows carelessly against the bar outside the window, and shook off the mud from its shoes, and also lent and borrowed fire for pipes.

Custodian re-enters from his door. “Again once, gentlemen, you are invited——” No

further invitation necessary. Ready dash into the street. Toilet finished. Old man coming out.

This time, the interest was grown too hot to admit of toleration of the boys on the stone posts. The homicidal white-lead worker made a pounce upon one boy who was hoisting himself up, and brought him to earth amidst general commendation. Closely stowed as we were, we yet formed into groups—groups of conversation, without separation from the mass—to discuss the old man. Rivals of the tall and sallow mason sprang into being, and here, again, was popular inconstancy. These rivals attracted audiences, and were greedily listened to; and whereas they had derived their information solely from the tall and sallow one, officious members of the crowd now sought to enlighten *him* on their authority. Changed by this social experience into an iron-visaged and inveterate misanthrope, the mason glared at mankind, and evidently cherished in his breast the wish that the whole of the present company could change places with the deceased old man. And now listeners became inattentive, and people made a start forward at a slight sound, and an unholy fire kindled in the public eye, and those next the gates beat at them impatiently, as if they were of the cannibal species and hungry.

Again the hinges creaked, and we rushed. Disorderly pressure for some time ensued before the uncommercial unit got figured into the front row of the sum. It was strange to see so much heat and uproar seething about one poor spare white-haired old man, quiet for evermore. He was calm of feature and undisfigured, as he lay on his back—having been struck upon the hinder part of the head, and thrown forward—and something like a tear or two had started from the closed eyes, and lay wet upon the face. The uncommercial interest, sated at a glance, directed itself upon the striving crowd on either side and behind: wondering whether one might have guessed, from the expression of those faces merely, what kind of sight they were looking at. The differences of expression were not many. There was a little pity, but not much, and that mostly with a selfish touch in it—as who would say, “Shall I, poor I, look like that when the time comes?” There was more of a secretly-brooding contemplation and curiosity, as, “That man I don’t like, and have the grudge against; would such be his appearance, if some one—not to mention names—by any chance gave him an ugly knock?” There was a wolfish stare at the object, in which the homicidal white-lead worker shone conspicuous. And there was a much

more general, purposeless, vacant staring at it—² like looking at wax-work without a catalogue, and not knowing what to make of it. But all these expressions concurred in possessing the one underlying expression of *looking at something that could not return a look*. The uncommercial notice had established this as very remarkable, when a new pressure all at once coming up from the street pinioned him ignominiously, and hurried him into the arms (now sleeved again) of the Custodian smoking at his door, and answering questions, between puffs, with a certain placid meritorious air of not being proud, though high in office. And, mentioning pride, it may be observed, by the way, that one could not well help investing the original sole occupant of the front row with an air depreciatory of the legitimate attraction of the poor old man: while the two in the second row seemed to exult at his superseded popularity.

Pacing presently round the garden of the Tower of St. Jacques de la Boucherie, and presently again in front of the Hôtel de Ville, I called to mind a certain desolate open-air Morgue that I happened to light upon in London, one day in the hard winter of 1861, and which seemed as strange to me, at the time of seeing it, as if I had found it in China. Towards that hour of a winter’s afternoon when the lamp-lighters are beginning to light the lamps in the streets a little before they are wanted, because the darkness thickens fast and soon, I was walking in from the country on the northern side of the Regent’s Park—hard frozen and deserted—when I saw an empty Hansom cab drive up to the lodge at Gloucester Gate, and the driver with great agitation call to the man there: who quickly reached a long pole from a tree, and, deftly collared by the driver, jumped to the step of his little seat, and so the Hansom rattled out at the gate, galloping over the iron-bound road. I followed running, though not so fast but that when I came to the right-hand Canal Bridge, near the cross-path to Chalk Farm, the Hansom was stationary, the horse was smoking hot, the long pole was idle on the ground, and the driver and the park-keeper were looking over the bridge parapet. Looking over too, I saw, lying on the towing-path, with her face turned up towards us, a woman, dead a day or two, and under thirty, as I guessed, poorly dressed in black. The feet were lightly crossed at the ankles, and the dark hair, all pushed back from the face, as though that had been the last action of her desperate hands, streamed over the ground. Dabbled all about her were the water and the broken ice that had dropped from her dress, and had

splashed as she was got out. The policeman who had just got her out, and the passing costermonger who had helped him, were standing near the body; the latter with that stare at it which I have likened to being at a wax-work exhibition without a catalogue; the former looking over his stock, with professional stiffness and coolness, in the direction in which the bearers he had sent for were expected. So dreadfully forlorn, so dreadfully sad, so dreadfully mysterious, the spectacle of our dear sister here departed! A barge came up, breaking the floating ice and the silence, and a woman steered it. The man with the horse that towed it cared so little for the body, that the stumbling hoofs had been among the hair, and the tow-rope had caught and turned the head, before our cry of horror took him to the bridle. At which sound the steering woman looked up at us on the bridge with contempt unutterable, and then looking down at the body with a similar expression—as if it were made in another likeness from herself, had been informed with other passions, had been lost by other chances, had had another nature dragged down to perdition—steered a spurning streak of mud at it, and passed on.

A better experience, but also of the Morgue kind, in which chance happily made me useful in a slight degree, arose to my remembrance as I took my way by the Boulevard de Sebastopol to the brighter scenes of Paris.

The thing happened, say, five-and-twenty years ago. I was a modest young uncommercial then, and timid and inexperienced. Many suns and winds have browned me in the line, but those were my pale days. Having newly taken the lease of a house in a certain distinguished metropolitan parish—a house which then appeared to me to be a frightfully first-class Family Mansion, involving awful responsibilities—I became the prey of a Beadle. I think the Beadle must have seen me going in or coming out, and must have observed that I tottered under the weight of my grandeur. Or he may have been hiding under straw when I bought my first horse (in the desirable stable-yard attached to the first-class Family Mansion), and when the vendor remarked to me, in an original manner, on bringing him for approval, taking his cloth off and smacking him, "There, sir! *There's* a Orse!" And when I said gallantly, "How much do you want for him?" and when the vendor said, "No more than sixty guineas from you;" and when I said smartly, "Why not more than sixty from *me*?" And when he said crushingly, "Because, upon my soul and body, he'd be considered cheap at

seventy by one who understood the subject—but you don't."—I say, the Beadle may have been in hiding under straw when this disgrace befell me, or he may have noted that I was too raw and young an Atlas to carry the first-class Family Mansion in a knowing manner. Be this as it may, the Beadle did what Melancholy did to the youth in Gray's *Elegy*—he marked me for his own. And the way in which the Beadle did it was this: he summoned me as a Jurymen on his Coroner's Inquests.

In my first feverish alarm I repaired "for safety and for succour"—like those sagacious Northern shepherds who, having had no previous reason whatever to believe in young Norval, very prudently did not originate the hazardous idea of believing in him—to a deep householder. This profound man informed me that the Beadle counted on my buying him off; on my bribing him not to summon me; and that if I would attend an Inquest with a cheerful countenance, and profess alacrity in that branch of my country's service, the Beadle would be disheartened, and would give up the game.

I roused my energies, and, the next time the wily Beadle summoned me, I went. The Beadle was the blankest Beadle I have ever looked on when I answered to my name, and his discomfiture gave me courage to go through with it.

We were empanelled to inquire concerning the death of a very little mite of a child. It was the old miserable story. Whether the mother had committed the minor offence of concealing the birth, or whether she had committed the major offence of killing the child, was the question on which we were wanted. We must commit her on one of the two issues.

The Inquest came off in the parish work-house, and I have yet a lively impression that I was unanimously received by my brother Jurymen as a brother of the utmost conceivable insignificance. Also that, before we began, a broker who had lately cheated me fearfully in the matter of a pair of card-tables, was for the utmost rigour of the law. I remember that we sat in a sort of board-room, on such very large square horsehair chairs that I wondered what race of Patagonians they were made for; and further, that an undertaker gave me his card when we were in the full moral freshness of having just been sworn, as "an inhabitant that was newly come into the parish, and was likely to have a young family." The case was then stated to us by the Coroner, and then we went down-stairs—led by the plotting Beadle—to view the body. From that day to this, the poor

little figure, on which that sounding legal appellation was bestowed, has lain in the same place, had with the same surroundings, to my thinking, and a kind of crypt devoted to the warehousing in the parochial coffins, and in the midst of a perfect Panorama of coffins of all sizes, it was stretched on a box; the mother had put it in her box—this box—almost as soon as it was born, and it had been presently found there. It had been opened, and neatly sewn up, and, regarded from that point of view, it looked like a stuffed creature. It rested on a clean white cloth, with a surgical instrument or so at hand, and, regarded from that point of view, it looked as if the cloth were “laid,” and the Giant were coming to dinner. There was nothing repellent about the poor piece of innocence, and it demanded a mere form of looking at. So, we looked at an old pauper who was going about among the coffins with a foot-rule, as if he were a case of Self-Measurement; and we looked at one another; and we said the place was well whitewashed anyhow; and then our conversational powers as a British Jury flagged, and the foreman said, “All right, gentlemen? Back again, Mr. Beadle!”

The miserable young creature who had given birth to this child within a very few days, and who had cleaned the cold wet door-steps immediately afterwards, was brought before us when we resumed our horsehair chairs, and was present during the proceedings. She had a horsehair chair herself, being very weak and ill; and I remember how she turned to the unsympathetic nurse who attended her, and who might have been the figure-head of a pauper ship, and how she hid her face and sobs and tears upon that wooden shoulder. I remember, too, how hard her mistress was upon her (she was a servant-of-all-work), and with what a cruel pertinacity that piece of Virtue spun her thread of evidence double, by intertwisting it with the sternest thread of construction. Smitten hard by the terrible low wail from the utterly friendless orphan girl, which never ceased during the whole inquiry; I took heart to ask this witness a question or two, which hopefully admitted of an answer that might give a favourable turn to the case. She made the turn as little favourable as it could be, but it did some good, and the Coroner, who was nobly patient and humane (he was the late Mr. Wakley), cast a look of strong encouragement in my direction. Then we had the doctor who had made the examination, and the usual tests as to whether the child was born alive; but he was a timid muddle-headed doctor, and got confused and contra-

dictory, and wouldn't say this, and couldn't answer for that, and the immaculate broker was too much for him, and our side slid back again. However, I tried again, and the Coroner backed me again, for which I ever afterwards felt grateful to him, as I do now to his memory; and we got another favourable turn out of some other witness, some member of the family with a strong prepossession against the sinner; and I think we had the doctor back again; and I know that the Coroner summed up for our side, and that I and my British brothers turned round to discuss our verdict, and get ourselves into great difficulties with our large chairs and the broker. At that stage of the case I tried hard again, being convinced that I had cause for it; and at last we found for the minor offence of only concealing the birth; and the poor desolate creature, who had been taken out during our deliberation, being brought in again to be told of the verdict, then dropped upon her knees before us, with protestations that we were right—protestations among the most affecting that I have ever heard in my life—and was carried away insensible.

(In private conversation after this was all over, the Coroner showed me his reasons, as a trained surgeon, for perceiving it to be impossible that the child could, under the most favourable circumstances, have drawn many breaths, in the very doubtful case of its having ever breathed at all; this, owing to the discovery of some foreign matter in the windpipe, quite irreconcilable with many moments of life.)

When the agonised girl had made those final protestations, I had seen her face, and it was in unison with her distracted heart-broken voice, and it was very moving. It certainly did not impress me by any beauty that it had, and if I ever see it again in another world I shall only know it by the help of some new sense or intelligence. But it came to me in my sleep that night, and I selfishly dismissed it in the most efficient way I could think of. I caused some extra care to be taken of her in the prison, and counsel to be retained for her defence when she was tried at the Old Bailey; and her sentence was lenient, and her history and conduct proved that it was right. In doing the little I did for her, I remember to have had the kind help of some gentle-hearted functionary to whom I addressed myself—but what functionary I have long forgotten—who I suppose was officially present at the Inquest.

I regard this as a very notable uncommercial experience, because this good came of a Beadle. And, to the best of my knowledge, information,

and belief, it is the only good that ever did come of a Beadle since the first Beadle put on his cocked-hat.

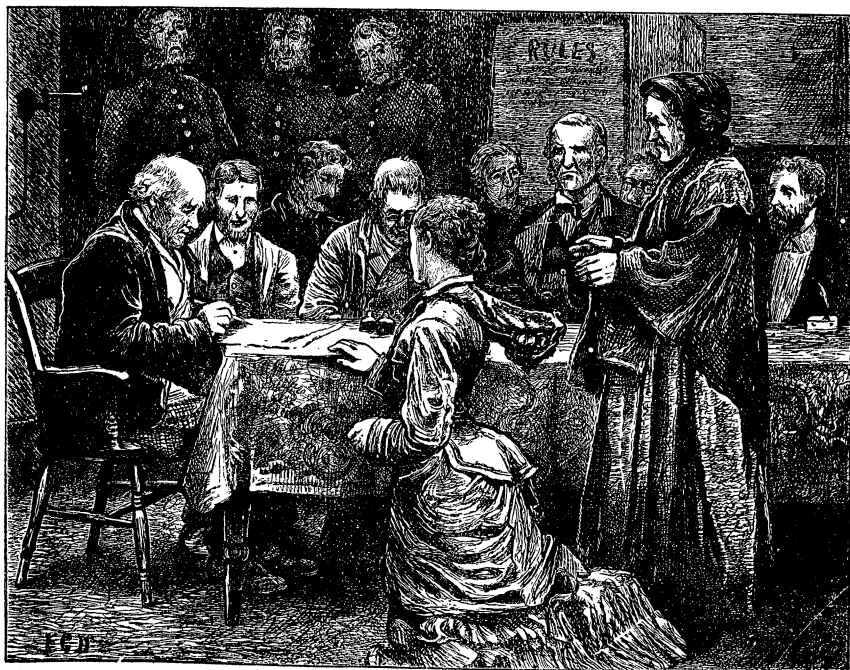
XIX.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS.

IT came into my mind that I would recall in these notes a few of the many hostelries I have rested at in the course of my journeys ;

and, indeed, I had taken up my pen for the purpose, when I was baffled by an accidental circumstance. It was the having to leave off, to wish the owner of a certain bright face that looked in at my door "many happy returns of the day." Thereupon a new thought came into my mind, driving its predecessor out, and I began to recall—instead of Inns—the birthdays that I have put up at, on my way to this present sheet of paper.

I can very well remember being taken out to visit some peach-faced creature in a blue sash,



"THEN DROPPED UPON HER KNEES BEFORE US, WITH PROTESTATIONS THAT WE WERE RIGHT."

and shoes to correspond, whose life I supposed to consist entirely of birthdays. Upon seed-cake, sweet wine, and shining presents, that glorified young person seemed to me to be exclusively reared. At so early a stage of my travels did I assist at the anniversary of her nativity (and become enamoured of her), that I had not yet acquired the recondite knowledge that a birthday is the common property of all who are born, but supposed it to be a special

gift bestowed by the favouring Heavens on that one distinguished infant. There was no other company, and we sat in a shady bower—under a table, as my better (or worse) knowledge leads me to believe—and were regaled with saccharine substances and liquids, until it was time to part. A bitter powder was administered to me next morning, and I was wretched. On the whole, a pretty accurate foreshadowing of my more mature experiences in such wise !

Then came the time when, inseparable from one's own birthday, was a certain sense of merit, a consciousness of well-earned distinction. When I regarded my birthday as a graceful achievement of my own, a monument of my perseverance, independence, and good sense, redounding greatly to my honour. This was at about the period when Olympia Squires became involved in the anniversary. Olympia was most beautiful (of course), and I loved her to that degree, that I used to be obliged to get out of my little bed in the night, expressly to exclaim to Solitude, "Oh, Olympia Squires!" Visions of Olympia, clothed entirely in sage-green, from which I infer a defectively-educated taste on the part of her respected parents, who were necessarily unacquainted with the South Kensington Museum, still arise before me. Truth is sacred, and the visions are crowned by a shining white beaver bonnet, impossibly suggestive of a little feminine postboy. My memory presents a birthday when Olympia and I were taken by an unfeeling relative—some cruel uncle, or the like—to a slow torture called an Orrery. The terrible instrument was set up at the local Theatre, and I had expressed a profane wish in the morning that it was a Play: for which a serious aunt had probed my conscience deep, and my pocket deeper, by reclaiming a bestowd half-crown. It was a venerable and a shabby Orrery, at least one thousand stars and twenty-five comets behind the age. Nevertheless, it was awful. When the low-spirited gentleman with a wand said, "Ladies and gentlemen" (meaning particularly Olympia and me), "the lights are about to be put out, but there is not the slightest cause for alarm," it was very alarming. Then the planets and stars began. Sometimes they wouldn't come on, sometimes they wouldn't go off, sometimes they had holes in them, and mostly they didn't seem to be good likenesses. All this time the gentleman with the wand was going on in the dark (tapping away at the heavenly bodies between-whiles, like a wearisome woodpecker) about a sphere revolving on its own axis eight hundred and ninety-seven thousand millions of times—or miles—in two hundred and sixty-three thousand five hundred and twenty-four millions of something else, until I thought, if this was a birthday, it were better never to have been born. Olympia, also, became much depressed, and we both slumbered and woke cross, and still the gentleman was going on in the dark—whether up in the stars, or down on the stage, it would have been hard to make out, if it had been worth trying—ciphering away about planes of orbits, to such an infamous extent that

Olympia, stung to madness, actually kicked me. A pretty birthday spectacle, when the lights were turned up again, and all the schools in the town (including the National, who had come in for nothing, and serve them right, for they were always throwing stones) were discovered with exhausted countenances, screwing their knuckles into their eyes, or clutching their heads of hair. A pretty birthday speech when Doctor Sleek of the City Free bobbed up his powdered head in the stage box, and said that before this assembly dispersed he really must beg to express his entire approval of a lecture as improving, as informing, as devoid of anything that could call a blush into the cheek of youth, as any it had ever been his lot to hear delivered. A pretty birthday altogether, when Astronomy couldn't leave poor Small Olympia Squires and me alone, but must put an end to our loves! For, we never got over it; the threadbare Orrery outwore our mutual tenderness; the man with the wand was too much for the boy with the bow.

When shall I disconnect the combined smells of oranges, brown paper, and straw, from those other birthdays at school, when the coming hamper casts its shadow before, and when a week of social harmony—shall I add of admiring and affectionate popularity—led up to that Institution? What noble sentiments were expressed to me in the days before the hamper, what vows of friendship were sworn to me, what exceedingly old knives were given me, what generous avowals of having been in the wrong emanated from else obstinate spirits once enrolled among my enemies! The birthday of the potted game and guava jelly is still made special to me by the noble conduct of Bully Globson. Letters from home had mysteriously inquired whether I should be much surprised and disappointed if, among the treasures in the coming hamper, I discovered potted game, and guava jelly from the Western Indies. I had mentioned those hints in confidence to a few friends, and had promised to give away, as I now see reason to believe, a handsome covey of partridges potted, and about a hundredweight of guava jelly. It was now that Globson, Bully no more, sought me out in the playground. He was a big fat boy, with a big fat head and a big fat fist, and, at the beginning of that Half, had raised such a bump on my forehead that I couldn't get my hat of state on, to go to church. He said that after an interval of cool reflection (four months), he now felt this blow to have been an error of judgment, and that he wished to apologise for the same. Not only that, but, holding down his big head between his two big hands

in order that I might reach it conveniently, he requested me, as an act of justice which would appease his awakened conscience, to raise a retributive bump upon it, in the presence of witnesses. This handsome proposal I modestly declined, and he then embraced me, and we walked away conversing. We conversed respecting the West India Islands, and, in the pursuit of knowledge, he asked me with much interest whether, in the course of my reading, I had met with any reliable description of the mode of manufacturing guava jelly; or whether I had ever happened to taste that conserve, which he had been given to understand was of rare excellence.

Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty; and then with the waning months came an ever-augmenting sense of the dignity of twenty-one. Heaven knows I had nothing to "come into," save the bare birthday, and yet I esteemed it as a great possession. I now and then paved the way to my state of dignity by beginning a proposition with the casual words, "say that a man of twenty-one," or by the incidental assumption of a fact that could not sanely be disputed, as, "for when a fellow comes to be a man of twenty-one." I gave a party on the occasion. She was there. It is unnecessary to name Her more particularly; she was older than I, and had pervaded every chink and crevice of my mind for three or four years. I had held volumes of Imaginary Conversations with her mother on the subject of our union, and I had written letters more in number than Horace Walpole's, to that discreet woman, soliciting her daughter's hand in marriage. I had never had the remotest intention of sending any of those letters; but to write them, and after a few days tear them up, had been a sublime occupation. Sometimes I had begun, "Honoured Madam. I think that a lady gifted with those powers of observation which I know you to possess, and endowed with those womanly sympathies with the young and ardent which it were more than heresy to doubt, can scarcely have failed to discover that I love your adorable daughter deeply, devotedly." In less buoyant states of mind I had begun, "Bear with me, Dear Madam, bear with a daring wretch who is about to make a surprising confession to you, wholly unanticipated by yourself; and which he beseeches you to commit to the flames as soon as you have become aware to what a towering height his mad ambition soars." At other times—periods of profound mental depression, when She had gone out to balls where I was not—the draft took the affecting form of a paper to be

left on my table after my departure to the confines of the globe. As thus: "For Mrs. Onowenever, these lines when the hand that traces them shall be far away. I could not bear the daily torture of hopelessly loving the dear one whom I will not name. Broiling on the coast of Africa, or congealing on the shores of Greenland, I am far far better there than here." (In this sentiment my cooler judgment perceives that the family of the beloved object would have most completely concurred.) "If I ever emerge from obscurity, and my name is ever heralded by Fame, it will be for her dear sake. If I ever amass Gold, it will be to pour it at her feet. Should I, on the other hand, become the prey of Ravens——" I doubt if I ever quite made up my mind what was to be done in that affecting case; I tried "then it is better so;" but, not feeling convinced that it would be better so, I vacillated between leaving all else blank, which looked expressive and bleak, or winding up with "Farewell!"

This fictitious correspondence of mine is to blame for the foregoing digression. I was about to pursue the statement that on my twenty-first birthday I gave a party, and She was there. It was a beautiful party. There was not a single animate or inanimate object connected with it (except the company and myself) that I had ever seen before. Everything was hired, and the mercenaries in attendance were profound strangers to me. Behind a door, in the crumby part of the night when wine-glasses were to be found in unexpected spots, I spoke to Her—spoke out to Her. What passed I cannot, as a man of honour, reveal. She was all angelical gentleness, but a word was mentioned—a short and dreadful word of three letters, beginning with a B—which, as I remarked at the moment, "scorched my brain." She went away soon afterwards, and when the hollow throng (though to be sure it was no fault of theirs) dispersed, I issued forth with a dissipated scornee, and, as I mentioned expressly to him, "sought oblivion." It was found, with a dreadful headache in it, but it didn't last; for, in the shaming light of next day's noon, I raised my heavy head in bed, looking back to the birthdays behind me, and tracking the circle by which I had got round, after all, to the bitter powder and the wretchedness again.

This reactionary powder (taken so largely by the human race that I am inclined to regard it as the Universal Medicine once sought for in Laboratories) is capable of being made up in another form for birthday use. Anybody's long-lost brother will do ill to turn up on a birthday.

If I had a long-lost brother, I should know beforehand that he would prove a tremendous fraternal failure if he appointed to rush into my arms on my birthday. The first Magic Lantern I ever saw was secretly and elaborately planned to be the great effect of a very juvenile birthday; but it wouldn't act, and its images were dim. My experience of adult birthday Magic Lanterns may possibly have been unfortunate, but has certainly been similar. I have an illustrative birthday in my eye: a birthday of my friend Flipfield, whose birthdays had long been remarkable as social successes. There had been nothing set or formal about them; Flipfield having been accustomed merely to say, two or three days before, "Don't forget to come and dine, old boy, according to custom." I don't know what he said to the ladies he invited, but I may safely assume it *not* to have been "old girl." Those were delightful gatherings, and were enjoyed by all participators. In an evil hour, a long-lost brother of Flipfield's came to light in foreign parts. Where he had been hidden, or what he had been doing, I don't know, for Flipfield vaguely informed me that he had turned up "on the banks of the Ganges"—speaking of him as if he had been washed ashore. The Long-lost was coming home, and Flipfield made an unfortunate calculation, based on the well-known regularity of the P. and O. steamers, that matters might be so contrived as that the Long-lost should appear in the nick of time on his (Flipfield's) birthday. Delicacy commanded that I should repress the gloomy anticipations with which my soul became fraught when I heard of this plan. The fatal day arrived, and we assembled in force. Mrs. Flipfield senior formed an interesting feature in the group, with a blue-veined miniature of the late Mr. Flipfield round her neck, in an oval, resembling a tart from the pastrycook's: his hair powdered, and the bright buttons on his coat evidently very like. She was accompanied by Miss Flipfield, the eldest of her numerous family, who held her pocket-handkerchief to her bosom in a majestic manner, and spoke to all of us (none of us had ever seen her before) in pious and condoning tones, of all the quarrels that had taken place in the family from her infancy—which must have been a long time ago—down to that hour. The Long-lost did not appear. Dinner, half an hour later than usual, was announced, and still no Long-lost. We sat down to table. The knife and fork of the Long-lost made a vacuum in Nature, and, when the champagne came round for the first time, Flipfield gave him up for the day, and had them removed.

It was then that the Long-lost gained the height of his popularity with the company; for my own part, I felt convinced that I loved him dearly. Flipfield's dinners are perfect, and he is the easiest and best of entertainers. Dinner went on brilliantly, and the more the Long-lost didn't come, the more comfortable we grew, and the more highly we thought of him. Flipfield's own man (who has a regard for me) was in the act of struggling with an ignorant stipendiary, to wrest from him the wooden leg of a guinea-fowl which he was pressing on my acceptance, and to substitute a slice of the breast, when a ringing at the door-bell suspended the strife. I looked round me, and perceived the sudden pallor which I knew my own visage revealed, reflected on the faces of the company. Flipfield hurriedly excused himself, went out, was absent for about a minute or two, and then re-entered with the Long-lost.

I beg to say distinctly that if the stranger had brought Mont Blanc with him, or had come attended by a retinue of eternal snows, he could not have chilled the circle to the marrow in a more efficient manner. Embodied failure sat enthroned upon the Long-lost's brow, and pervaded him to his Long-lost boots. In vain Mrs. Flipfield senior, opening her arms, exclaimed, "My Tom!" and pressed his nose against the counterfeit presentment of his other parent. In vain Miss Flipfield, in the first transports of this reunion, showed him a dint upon her maidenly cheek, and asked him if he remembered when he did that with the bellows? We, the bystanders, were overcome, but overcome by the palpable, undisguisable, utter, and total breakdown of the Long-lost. Nothing he could have done would have set him right with us but his instant return to the Ganges. In the very same moments it became established that the feeling was reciprocal, and that the Long-lost detested us. When a friend of the family (not myself, upon my honour), wishing to set things going again, asked him, while he partook of soup—asked him with an amiability of intention beyond all praise, but with a weakness of execution open to defeat—what kind of river he considered the Ganges, the Long-lost, scowling at the friend of the family over his spoon, as one of an abhorrent race, replied, "Why, a river of water, I suppose," and spooned his soup into himself with a malignancy of hand and eye that blighted the amiable questioner. Not an opinion could be elicited from the Long-lost in unison with the sentiments of any individual present. He contradicted Flipfield dead before he had eaten his salmon. He had no idea—or affected to have

no idea—that it was his brother's birthday, and, on the communication of that interesting fact to him, merely wanted to make him out four years older than he was. He was an antipathetical being, with a peculiar power and gift of treading on everybody's tenderest place. They talk in America of a man's "Platform." I should describe the Platform of the Long-lost as a Platform composed of other people's corns, on which he had stumped his way, with all his might and main, to his present position. It is needless to add that Flipfield's great birthday went by the board, and that he was a wreck when I pretended, at parting, to wish him many happy returns of it.

There is another class of birthdays at which I have so frequently assisted, that I may assume such birthdays to be pretty well known to the human race. My friend Mayday's birthday is an example. The guests have no knowledge of one another except on that one day in the year, and are annually terrified for a week by the prospect of meeting one another again. There is a fiction among us that we have uncommon reasons for being particularly lively and spirited on the occasion, whereas deep despondency is no phrase for the expression of our feelings. But the wonderful feature of the case is, that we are in tacit accordance to avoid the subject—to keep it as far off as possible, as long as possible—and to talk about anything else, rather than the joyful event. I may even go so far as to assert that there is a dumb compact among us that we will pretend that it is *not* Mayday's birthday. A mysterious and gloomy Being, who is said to have gone to school with Mayday, and who is so lank and lean that he seriously impugns the Dietary of the establishment at which they were jointly educated, always leads us, as I may say, to the block, by laying his grisly hand on a decanter, and begging us to fill our glasses. The devices and pretences that I have seen put in practice to defer the fatal moment, and to interpose between this man and his purpose, are innumerable. I have known desperate guests, when they saw the grisly hand approaching the decanter, wildly to begin, without any antecedent whatsoever, "That reminds me—" and to plunge into long stories. When at last the hand and the decanter come together, a shudder, a palpable, perceptible shudder, goes round the table. We receive the reminder that it is Mayday's birthday, as if it were the anniversary of some profound disgrace he had undergone, and we sought to comfort him. And when we have drunk Mayday's health, and wished him many happy

returns, we are seized for some moments with a ghastly blitheness, an unnatural levity, as if we were in the first flushed reaction of having undergone a surgical operation.

Birthdays of this species have a public as well as a private phase. My "boyhood's home," Dullborough, present a case in point. An Immortal Somebody was wanted in Dullborough, to dimple for a day the stagnant face of the waters; he was rather wanted by Dullborough generally, and much wanted by the principal hotel-keeper. The County history was looked up for a locally Immortal Somebody, but the registered Dullborough worthies were all Nobodies. In this state of things, it is hardly necessary to record that Dullborough did what every man does when he wants to write a book or deliver a lecture, and is provided with all the materials except a subject. It fell back upon Shakspeare.

No sooner was it resolved to celebrate Shakspeare's birthday in Dullborough than the popularity of the immortal bard became surprising. You might have supposed the first edition of his works to have been published last week, and enthusiastic Dullborough to have got half through them. (I doubt, by the way, whether it had ever done half that, but this is a private opinion.) A young gentleman with a sonnet, the retention of which for two years had enfeebled his mind and undermined his knees, got the sonnet into the Dullborough Warden, and gained flesh. Portraits of Shakspeare broke out in the book-shop windows, and our principal artist painted a large original portrait in oils for the decoration of the dining-room. It was not in the least like any of the other portraits, and was exceedingly admired, the head being much swollen. At the Institution, the Debating Society discussed the new question, Was there sufficient ground for supposing that the Immortal Shakspeare ever stole deer? This was indignantly decided by an overwhelming majority in the negative; indeed, there was but one vote on the Poaching side, and that was the vote of the orator who had undertaken to advocate it, and who became quite an obnoxious character—particularly to the Dullborough "roughs," who were about as well informed on the matter as most other people. Distinguished speakers were invited down, and very nearly came (but not quite). Subscriptions were opened, and committees sat, and it would have been far from a popular measure, in the height of the excitement, to have told Dullborough that it wasn't Stratford-upon-Avon. Yet, after all these preparations, when the great festivity

took place, and the portrait, elevated aloft, surveyed the company as if it were in danger of springing a mine of intellect and blowing itself up, it did undoubtedly happen, according to the inscrutable mysteries of things, that nobody could be induced, not to say to touch upon Shakspeare, but to come within a mile of him, until the crack speaker of Dullborough rose to propose the immortal memory. Which he did with the perplexing and astonishing result that before he had repeated the great name half-a-dozen times, or had been upon his legs as many minutes, he was assailed with a general shout of "Question."

.XX.

BOUND FOR THE GREAT SALT LAKE.

BEHOLD me on my way to an Emigrant Ship, on a hot morning early in June. My road lies through that part of London generally known to the initiated as "Down by the Docks." Down by the Docks, is home to a good many people—to too many, if I may judge from the overflow of local population in the streets—but my nose insinuates that the number to whom it is Sweet Home might be easily counted. Down by the Docks, is a region I would choose as my point of embarkation aboard ship if I were an emigrant. It would present my intention to me in such a sensible light; it would show me so many things to be run away from.

Down by the Docks, they eat the largest oysters, and scatter the roughest oyster shells, known to the descendants of St. George and the Dragon. Down by the Docks, they consume the slimiest of shell-fish, which seem to have been scraped off the copper bottoms of ships. Down by the Docks, the vegetables at greengrocers' doors acquire a saline and a scaly look, as if they had been crossed with fish and seaweed. Down by the Docks, they "board seamen" at the eating-houses, the public-houses, the slop-shops, the coffee-shops, the tally-shops, all kinds of shops mentionable and unmentionable—board them, as it were, in a piratical sense, making them bleed terribly, and giving no quarter. Down by the Docks, the seamen roam in mid-street and mid-day, their pockets inside out, and their heads no better. Down by the Docks, the daughters of wave-ruling Britannia also rove, clad in silken attire, with

uncovered tresses streaming in the breeze, bandana kerchiefs floating from their shoulders, and crinoline not wanting. Down by the Docks, you may hear the Incomparable Joe Jackson sing the Standard of England, with a hornpipe, any night; or any day may see at the wax-work, for a penny and no waiting, him as killed the policeman at Acton, and suffered for it. Down by the Docks, you may buy polonies, saveloys, and sausage preparations various, if you are not particular what they are made of besides seasoning. Down by the Docks, the children of Israel creep into any gloomy cribs and entries they can hire, and hang slops there—pewter watches, sou'-wester hats, waterproof overalls—"firht-rate articleth, Thjack." Down by the Docks, such dealers, exhibiting on a frame a complete nautical suit without the refinement of a waxen visage in the hat, present the imaginary wearer as drooping at the yard-arm, with his seafaring and earthfaring troubles over. Down by the Docks, the placards in the shops apostrophize the customer, knowing him familiarly beforehand, as "Look here, Jack!" "Here's your sort, my lad!" "Try our sea-going mixed, at two-and-nine!" "The right kit for the British tar!" "Ship ahoy!" "Splice the main-brace, brother!" "Come, cheer up, my lads! We've the best liquors here, And you'll find something new In our wonderful Beer!" Down by the Docks, the pawnbroker lends money on Union-Jack pocket-handkerchiefs, on watches with little ships pitching fore and aft on the dial, on telescopes, nautical instruments in cases, and such-like. Down by the Docks, the apothecary sets up in business on the wretchedest scale—chiefly on lint and plaster for the strapping of wounds—and with no bright bottles, and with no little drawers. Down by the Docks, the shabby undertaker's shop will bury you for next to nothing, after the Malay or Chinaman has stabbed you for nothing at all; so you can hardly hope to make a cheaper end. Down by the Docks, anybody drunk will quarrel with anybody drunk or sober, and everybody else will have a hand in it, and on the shortest notice you may revolve in a whirlpool of red shirts, shaggy beards, wild heads of hair, bare tattooed arms, Britannia's daughters, malice, mud, maundering, and madness. Down by the Docks, scraping fiddles go in the public-houses all day long, and, shrill above their din and all the din, rises the screeching of innumerable parrots brought from foreign parts, who appear to be very much astonished by what they find on these native shores of ours. Possibly the parrots don't know, possibly they do, that Down by the Docks is the road to the

Pacific Ocean, with its lovely islands, where the savage girls plait flowers, and the savage boys carve cocoa-nut shells, and the grim blind idols muse in their shady groves to exactly the same purpose as the priests and chiefs. And possibly the parrots don't know, possibly they do, that the noble savage is a wearisome impostor wherever he is, and has five hundred thousand volumes of indifferent rhyme, and no reason, to answer for.

Shadwell Church ! Pleasant whispers of there being a fresher air down the river than down by the Docks go pursuing one another, playfully, in and out of the openings in its spire. Gigantic in the basin just beyond the church, looms my Emigrant Ship : her name, the Amazon. Her figure-head is not *disfigured* as those beauteous founders of the race of strong-minded women are fabled to have been, for the convenience of drawing the bow ; but I sympathise with the carver :

" A flattering carver who made it his care
To carve busts as they ought to be—not as they were."

My Emigrant Ship lies broadside-on to the wharf. Two great gangways made of spars and planks connect her with the wharf ; and up and down these gangways, perpetually crowding to and fro, and in and out, like ants, are the Emigrants who are going to sail in my Emigrant Ship. Some with cabbages, some with loaves of bread, some with cheese and butter, some with milk and beer, some with boxes, beds, and bundles, some with babies—nearly all with children—nearly all with bran-new tin cans for their daily allowance of water, uncomfortably suggestive of a tin flavour in the drink. To and fro, up and down, aboard and ashore, swarming here and there and everywhere, my Emigrants. And still, as the Dock gate swings upon its hinges, cabs appear, and carts appear, and vans appear, bringing more of my Emigrants, with more cabbages, more loaves, more cheese and butter, more milk and beer, more boxes, beds, and bundles, more tin cans, and on those shipping investments accumulated compound interest of children.

I go aboard my Emigrant Ship. I go first to the great Cabin, and find it in the usual condition of a cabin at that pass. Perspiring landmen, with loose papers, and with pens and inkstands, pervade it ; and the general appearance of things is as if the late Mr. Amazon's funeral had just come home from the cemetery, and the disconsolate Mrs. Amazon's trustees found the affairs in great disorder, and were looking high

and low for the will. I go out on the poop-deck for air, and surveying the emigrants on the deck below (indeed, they are crowded all about me, up there too), find more pens and inkstands in action, and more papers, and interminable complication respecting accounts with individuals for tin cans and what not. But nobody is in an ill-temper, nobody is the worse for drink, nobody swears an oath or uses a coarse word, nobody appears depressed, nobody is weeping, and down upon the deck, in every corner where it is possible to find a few square feet to kneel, crouch, or lie in, people, in every unsuitable attitude for writing, are writing letters.

Now, I have seen emigrant ships before this day in June. And these people are so strikingly different from all other people in like circumstances whom I have ever seen, that I wonder aloud, "What *would* a stranger suppose these emigrants to be?"

The vigilant bright face of the weather-browned captain of the Amazon is at my shoulder, and he says, "What, indeed? The most of these came aboard yesterday evening. They came from various parts of England, in small parties that had never seen one another before. Yet they had not been a couple of hours on board, when they established their own police, made their own regulations, and set their own watches at all the hatchways. Before nine o'clock, the ship was as orderly and as quiet as a man-of-war."

I looked about me, again, and saw the letter-writing going on with the most curious composure. Perfectly abstracted in the midst of the crowd ; while great casks were swinging aloft, and being lowered into the hold ; while hot agents were hurrying up and down, adjusting the interminable accounts ; while two hundred strangers were searching everywhere for two hundred other strangers, and were asking questions about them of two hundred more ; while the children played up and down all the steps, and in and out among all the people's legs, and were beheld, to the general dismay, toppling over all the dangerous places ; the letter-writers wrote on calmly. On the starboard side of the ship a grizzled man dictated a long letter to another grizzled man in an immense fur cap : which letter was of so profound a quality, that it became necessary for the amanuensis at intervals to take off his fur cap in both his hands, for the ventilation of his brain, and stare at him who dictated, as a man of many mysteries who was worth looking at. On the larboard side a woman had covered a belaying-pin with a white cloth to make a neat desk of it, and was sitting

on a little box, writing with the deliberation of a book-keeper. Down upon her breast on the planks of the deck at this woman's feet, with her head diving in under a beam of the bulwarks on that side, as an eligible place of refuge for her sheet of paper, a neat and pretty girl wrote for a good hour (she fainted at last), only rising to the surface occasionally for a dip of ink. Alongside the boat, close to me on the poop-deck, another girl, a fresh well-grown country girl, was writing another letter on the bare deck. Later in the day, when this selfsame boat was filled with a choir who sang glees and catches for a long time, one of the singers, a girl, sang her part mechanically all the while, and wrote a letter in the bottom of the boat while doing so.

"A stranger would be puzzled to guess the right name for these people, Mr. Uncommercial," says the captain.

"Indeed he would."

"If you hadn't known, could you ever have supposed——?"

"How could I? I should have said they were, in their degree, the pick and flower of England."

"So should I," says the captain.

"How many are they?"

"Eight hundred in round numbers."

I went between-decks, where the families with children swarmed in the dark, where unavoidable confusion had been caused by the last arrivals, and where the confusion was increased by the little preparations for dinner that were going on in each group. A few women, here and there, had got lost, and were laughing at it, and asking their way to their own people, or out on deck again. A few of the poor children were crying; but otherwise the universal cheerfulness was amazing. "We shall shake down by to-morrow." "We shall come all right in a day or so." "We shall have more light at sea." Such phrases I heard everywhere, as I groped my way among chests and barrels and beams and unstowed cargo and ring-bolts and emigrants, down to the lower deck, and thence up to the light of day again, and to my former station.

Surely, an extraordinary people in their power of self-abstraction. All the former letter-writers were still writing calmly, and many more letter-writers had broken out in my absence. A boy with a bag of books in his hand, and a slate under his arm, emerged from below, concentrated himself in my neighbourhood (espying a convenient sky-light for his purpose), and went to work at a sum as if he were stone deaf. A

father and mother and several young children, on the main-deck below me, had formed a family circle close to the foot of the crowded restless gangway, where the children made a nest for themselves in a coil of rope, and the father and mother, she suckling the youngest, discussed family affairs as peaceably as if they were in perfect retirement. I think the most noticeable characteristic in the eight hundred, as a mass, was their exemption from hurry.

Eight hundred what? "Geese, villain?" EIGHT HUNDRED MORMONS. I, Uncommercial Traveller for the firm of Human Interest Brothers, had come aboard this Emigrant Ship to see what Eight Hundred Latter-day Saints were like, and I found them (to the rout and overthrow of all my expectations) like what I now describe with scrupulous exactness.

The Mormon-Agent who had been active in getting them together, and in making the contract with my friends the owners of the ship to take them as far as New York on their way to the Great Salt Lake, was pointed out to me. A compactly-made handsome man in black, rather short, with rich brown hair and beard, and clear bright eyes. From his speech, I should set him down as American. Probably a man who had "knocked about the world" pretty much. A man with a frank open manner, and unshrinking look; withal a man of great quickness. I believe he was wholly ignorant of my uncommercial individuality, and consequently of my immense uncommercial importance.

UNCOMMERCIAL. These are a very fine set of people you have brought together here.

MORMON AGENT. Yes, sir, they are a *very* fine set of people.

UNCOMMERCIAL (looking about). Indeed, I think it would be difficult to find eight hundred people together anywhere else, and find so much beauty and so much strength and capacity for work among them.

MORMON AGENT (not looking about, but looking steadily at Uncommercial). I think so.—We sent out about a thousand more, yes'day, from Liverpool.

UNCOMMERCIAL. You are not going with these emigrants?

MORMON AGENT. No, sir. I remain.

UNCOMMERCIAL. But you have been in the Mormon Territory?

MORMON AGENT. Yes; I left Utah about three years ago.

UNCOMMERCIAL. It is surprising to me that these people are all so cheery, and make so little of the immense distance before them.

MORMON AGENT. Well, you see; many of 'em

have friends out at Utah, and many of 'em look forward to meeting friends on the way.

UNCOMMERCIAL. On the way?

MORMON AGENT. This way 'tis. This ship lands 'em in New York City. Then they go on by rail right away beyond St. Louis, to that part of the Banks of the Missouri where they strike the Plains. There, waggons from the settlement meet 'em to bear 'em company on their journey 'cross—twelve hundred miles about. Industrious people who come out to the settlement soon get waggons of their own, and so the friends of some of these will come down in their own waggons to meet 'em. They look forward to that greatly.

UNCOMMERCIAL. On their long journey across the Desert, do you arm them?

MORMON AGENT. Mostly you will find they have arms of some kind or another already with them. Such as had not arms we should arm across the Plains for the general protection and defence.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Will these waggons bring down any produce to the Missouri?

MORMON AGENT. Well, since the war broke out, we've taken to growing cotton, and they'll likely bring down cotton to be exchanged for machinery. We want machinery. Also we have taken to grow indigo, which is a fine commodity for profit. It has been found that the climate on the further side of the Great Salt Lake suits well for raising indigo.

UNCOMMERCIAL. I am told that these people now on board are principally from the South of England?

MORMON AGENT. And from Wales. That's true.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Do you get many Scotch?

MORMON AGENT. Not many.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Highlanders, for instance.

MORMON AGENT. No, not Highlanders. They ain't interested enough in universal brotherhood and peace and good-will.

UNCOMMERCIAL. The old fighting blood is strong in them?

MORMON AGENT. Well, yes. And, besides, they've no faith.

UNCOMMERCIAL (who has been burning to get at the Prophet Joe Smith, and seems to discover an opening). Faith in—?

MORMON AGENT (far too many for Uncommercial). Well.—In anything!

Similarly, on this same head, the Uncommercial underwent discomfiture from a Wiltshire labourer: a simple, fresh-coloured farm labourer of eight-and-thirty, who at one time stood beside him looking on at new arrivals, and with whom he held this dialogue:

UNCOMMERCIAL. Would you mind my asking you what part of the country you come from?

WILTSHIRE. Not a bit. Theer! (exultingly) I've worked all my life o' Salisbury Plain, right under the shadder o' Stonehenge. You mightn't think it, but I haive.

UNCOMMERCIAL. And a pleasant country too.

WILTSHIRE. Ah! 'Tis a pleasant country.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Have you any family on board?

WILTSHIRE. Two children, boy and gal. I am a widderer, I am, and I'm going out alonger my boy and gal. That's my gal, and she's a fine gal o' sixteen (pointing out the girl who is writing by the boat). I'll go and fetch my boy. I'd like to show you my boy. (Here Wiltshire disappears, and presently comes back with a big shy boy of twelve, in a superabundance of boots, who is not at all glad to be presented.) He is a fine boy too, and a boy fur to work! (Boy having undutifully bolted, Wiltshire drops him.)

UNCOMMERCIAL. It must cost you a great deal of money to go so far, three strong.

WILTSHIRE. A power of money. Theer! Eight shillen a week, eight shillen a week, eight shillen a week, put by out of the week's wages for ever so long.

UNCOMMERCIAL. I wonder how you did it.

WILTSHIRE (recognising in this a kindred spirit). See theer now! I wonder how I done it! But what with a bit o' subscription heer, and what with a bit o' help theer, it were done at last, though I don't hardly know how. Then it were unfort'net for us, you see, as we got kep' in Bristol so long—nigh a fortnight, it were—on accounts of a mistake wi' Brother Halliday. Swaller'd up money, it did, when we might have come straight on.

UNCOMMERCIAL (delicately approaching Joe Smith). You are of the Mormon religion, of course?

WILTSHIRE (confidently). Oh yes, I'm a Mormon! (Then reflectively.) I'm a Mormon. (Then, looking round the ship, feigns to descry a particular friend in an empty spot, and evades the Uncommercial for evermore.)

After a noontide pause for dinner, during which my emigrants were nearly all between-decks, and the Amazon looked deserted, a general muster took place. The muster was for the ceremony of passing the Government Inspector and the Doctor. Those authorities held their temporary state amidships, by a cask or two; and, knowing that the whole eight hundred emigrants must come face to face with them, I took my station behind the two. They knew nothing whatever of me, I believe, and my testimony

to the unpretending gentleness and good-nature with which they discharged their duty may be of the greater worth. There was not the slightest flavour of the Circumlocution Office about their proceedings.

The emigrants were now all on deck. They were densely crowded aft, and swarmed upon the poop-deck like bees. Two or three Mormon agents stood ready to hand them on to the Inspector, and to hand them forward when they had passed. By what successful means a

special aptitude for organisation had been infused into these people, I am, of course, unable to report. But I know that, even now, there was no disorder, hurry, or difficulty.

All being ready, the first group are handed on. That member of the party who is intrusted with the passenger ticket for the whole has been warned by one of the agents to have it ready, and here it is in his hand. In every instance through the whole eight hundred, without an exception, this paper is always ready.



"ON THE STARBOARD SIDE OF THE SHIP A GRIZZLED MAN DICTATED A LONG LETTER TO ANOTHER GRIZZLED MAN IN AN IMMENSE FUR CAP."

INSPECTOR (reading the ticket). Jessie Jobson, Sophronia Jobson, Jessie Jobson again, Matilda Jobson, William Jobson, Jane Jobson, Matilda Jobson again, Brigham Jobson, Leonardo Jobson, and Orson Jobson. Are you all here? (glancing at the party over his spectacles).

JESSIE JOBSON NUMBER TWO. All here, sir.

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This group is composed of an old grandfather and grandmother, their married son and his wife, and *their* family of children. Orson Jobson is a little child asleep in his mother's arms. The Doctor, with a kind word or so, lifts up the corner of the mother's shawl, looks at the child's face, and touches the little clenched hand. If we were all as well as Orson Jobson, doctoring would be a poor profession.

INSPECTOR. Quite right, Jessie Jobson. Take your ticket, Jessie, and pass on.

And away they go. Mormon agent, skilful and quiet, hands them on. Mormon agent, skilful and quiet, hands next party up.

INSPECTOR (reading ticket again). Susannah Cleverly and William Cleverly. Brother and sister, eh?

SISTER (young woman of business, hustling slow brother). Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. Very good, Susannah Cleverly. Take your ticket, Susannah, and take care of it.

And away they go.

INSPECTOR (taking ticket again). Sampson Dibble and Dorothy Dibble (surveying a very old couple over his spectacles with some surprise). Your husband quite blind, Mrs. Dibble?

MRS. DIBBLE. Yes, sir, he be stone blind.

MR. DIBBLE (addressing the mast). Yes, sir, I be stone blind.

INSPECTOR. That's a bad job. Take your ticket, Mrs. Dibble, and don't lose it, and pass on.

Doctor taps Mr. Dibble on the eyebrow with his forefinger, and away they go.

INSPECTOR (taking ticket again). Anastatia Weedle.

ANASTATIA (a pretty girl in a bright Garibaldi, this morning elected by universal suffrage the Beauty of the Ship). That is me, sir.

INSPECTOR. Going alone, Anastatia?

ANASTATIA (shaking her curls). I am with Mrs. Jobson, sir, but I've got separated for the moment.

INSPECTOR. Oh! you are with the Jobsons? Quite right. That'll do, Miss Weedle. Don't lose your ticket.

Away she goes, and joins the Jobsons who are waiting for her, and stoops and kisses Brigham Jobson—who appears to be considered too young for the purpose by several Mormons rising twenty, who are looking on. Before her extensive skirts have departed from the casks a decent widow stands there with four children, and so the roll goes.

The faces of some of the Welsh people, among whom there were many old persons, were certainly the least intelligent. Some of these emigrants would have bungled sorely, but for the directing hand that was always ready. The intelligence here was unquestionably of a low order, and the heads were of a poor type. Generally the case was the reverse. There were many worn faces bearing traces of patient poverty and hard work, and there was great steadiness of purpose and much undemonstrative self-respect among this class. A few young men

were going singly. Several girls were going two or three together. These latter I found it very difficult to refer back, in my mind, to their relinquished homes and pursuits. Perhaps they were more like country milliners, and pupil teachers rather tawdriy dressed, than any other classes of young women. I noticed, among many little ornaments worn, more than one photograph brooch of the Princess of Wales, and also of the late Prince Consort. Some single women of from thirty to forty, whom one might suppose to be embroiderers, or straw-bonnet makers, were obviously going out in quest of husbands, as finer ladies go to India. That they had any distinct notions of a plurality of husbands or wives, I do not believe. To suppose the family groups of whom the majority of emigrants were composed, polygamically possessed, would be to suppose an absurdity, manifest to any one who saw the fathers and mothers.

I should say (I had no means of ascertaining the fact) that most familiar kinds of handicraft trades were represented here. Farm labourers, shepherds, and the like, had their full share of representation, but I doubt if they preponderated. It was interesting to see how the leading spirit in the family circle never failed to show itself, even in the simple process of answering to the names as they were called, and checking off the owners of the names. Sometimes it was the father, much oftener the mother, sometimes a quick little girl second or third in order of seniority. It seemed to occur for the first time, to some heavy fathers, what large families they had; and their eyes rolled about, during the calling of the list, as if they half misdoubted some other family to have been smuggled into their own. Among all the fine handsome children, I observed but two with marks upon their necks that were probably scrofulous. Out of the whole number of emigrants, but one old woman was temporarily set aside by the Doctor, on suspicion of fever; but even she afterwards obtained a clean bill of health.

When all had "passed," and the afternoon began to wear on, a black box became visible on deck, which box was in charge of certain personages also in black, of whom only one had the conventional air of an itinerant preacher. This box contained a supply of hymn-books, neatly printed and got up, published at Liverpool, and also in London at the "Latter-Day Saints' Book Depot, 30, Florence Street." Some copies were handsomely bound; the plainer were the more in request, and many were bought. The title ran: "Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs for

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." The Preface, dated Manchester, 1840, ran thus :—"The Saints in this country have been very desirous for a Hymn Book adapted to their faith and worship, that they might sing the truth with an understanding heart, and express their praise, joy, and gratitude in songs adapted to the New and Everlasting Covenant. In accordance with their wishes, we have selected the following volume, which we hope will prove acceptable until a greater variety can be added. With sentiments of high consideration and esteem, we subscribe ourselves your brethren in the New and Everlasting Covenant, BRIGHAM YOUNG, PARLEY P. PRATT, JOHN TAYLOR." From this book—by no means explanatory to myself of the New and Everlasting Covenant, and not at all making my heart an understanding one on the subject of that mystery—a hymn was sung, which did not attract any great amount of attention, and was supported by a rather select circle. But the choir in the boat was very popular and pleasant; and there was to have been a Band, only the Cornet was late in coming on board. In the course of the afternoon a mother appeared from shore, in search of her daughter, "who had run away with the Mormons." She received every assistance from the Inspector, but her daughter was not found to be on board. The saints did not seem to me particularly interested in finding her.


Towards five o'clock the galley became full of tea-kettles, and an agreeable fragrance of tea pervaded the ship. There was no scrambling or jostling for the hot water, no ill-humour, no quarrelling. As the Amazon was to sail with the next tide, and as it would not be high water before two o'clock in the morning, I left her with her tea in full action, and her idle Steam Tug lying by, deputing steam and smoke for the time being to the Tea-kettles.

I afterwards learned that a Dispatch was sent home by the Captain before he struck out into the wide Atlantic, highly extolling the behaviour of these emigrants, and the perfect order and propriety of all their social arrangements. What is in store for the poor people on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, what happy delusions they are labouring under now, on what miserable blindness their eyes may be opened then, I do not pretend to say. But I went on board their ship to bear testimony against them if they deserved it, as I fully believed they would; to my great astonishment, they did not deserve it; and my predispositions and tendencies must not affect me as an honest witness. I went over the Amazon's side, feeling it impossible to deny

that, so far, some remarkable influence had produced a remarkable result, which better-known influences have often missed.*

XXI.

THE CITY OF THE ABSENT.

HEN I think I deserve particularly well of myself, and have earned the right to enjoy a little treat, I stroll from Covent Garden into the City of London, after business hours there, on a Saturday, or—better yet—on a Sunday, and roam about its deserted nooks and corners. It is necessary to the full enjoyment of these journeys that they should be made in summer-time, for then the retired spots that I love to haunt are at their idlest and dullest. A gentle fall of rain is not objectionable, and a warm mist sets off my favourite retreats to decided advantage.

Among these, City Churchyards hold a high place. Such strange churchyards hide in the City of London: churchyards sometimes so entirely detached from churches, always so pressed upon by houses; so small, so rank, so silent, so forgotten, except by the few people who ever look down into them from their smoky windows. As I stand peeping in through the iron gates and rails, I can peel the rusty metal off, like bark from an old tree. The illegible tombstones are all lop-sided, the grave-mounds lost their shape in the rains of a hundred years ago, the Lombardy Poplar or Plane Tree that was once a drysalter's daughter and several common-councilmen, has withered like those worthies, and its departed leaves are dust beneath it. Contagion of slow ruin overhangs the place. The discoloured tiled roofs of the environing buildings stand so awry, that they can hardly be proof against any stress of weather. Old crazy stacks of chimneys seem to look down as they

* After this Uncommercial Journey was printed, I happened to mention the experience it describes to Lord Houghton. That gentleman then showed me an article of his writing, in *The Edinburgh Review* for January, 1862, which is highly remarkable for its philosophical and literary research, concerning these Latter-Day Saints. I find in it the following sentences:—"The Select Committee of the House of Commons on emigrant ships for 1854, summoned the Mormon agent and passenger-broker before it, and came to the conclusion that no ships under the provisions of the 'Passengers Act' could be depended upon for comfort and security in the same degree as those under his administration. The Mormon ship is a Family under strong and accepted discipline, with every provision for comfort, decorum, and internal peace."

overhang, dubiously calculating how far they will have to fall. In an angle of the walls, what was once the tool-house of the grave-digger rots away, incrustured with toadstools. Pipes and spouts for carrying off the rain from the encompassing gables, broken or feloniously cut for old lead long ago, now let the rain drip and splash as it list upon the weedy earth. Sometimes there is a rusty pump somewhere near, and, as I look in at the rails and meditate, I hear it working under an unknown hand with a creaking protest: as though the departed in the churchyard urged, "Let us lie here in peace; don't suck us up and drink us!"

One of my best-beloved churchyards I call the churchyard of St. Ghastly Grim; touching what men in general call it, I have no information. It lies at the heart of the City, and the Black-wall Railway shrieks at it daily. It is a small small churchyard, with a ferocious strong spiked iron gate, like a gaol. This gate is ornamented with skulls and cross-bones, larger than the life, wrought in stone; but it likewise came into the mind of St. Ghastly Grim, that to stick iron splkes atop of the stone skulls, as though they were impaled, would be a pleasant device. Therefore the skulls grin aloft horribly, thrust through and through with iron spears. Hence, there is attraction of repulsion for me in St. Ghastly Grim, and, having often contemplated it in the daylight and the dark, I once felt drawn towards it in a thunder-storm at midnight. "Why not?" I said in self-excuse. "I have been to see the Coliseum by the light of the moon; is it worse to go to see St. Ghastly Grim by the light of the lightning?" I repaired to the Saint in a hackney cab, and found the skulls most effective, having the air of a public execution, and seeming, as the lightning flashed, to wink and grin with the pain of the spikes. Having no other person to whom to impart my satisfaction, I communicated it to the driver. So far from being responsive, he surveyed me—he was naturally a bottle-nosed red-faced man—with a blanched countenance. And, as he drove me back, he ever and again glanced in over his shoulder through the little front window of his carriage, as mistrusting that I was a fare originally from a grave in the churchyard of St. Ghastly Grim, who might have flitted home again without paying.

Sometimes, the queer Hall of some queer Company gives upon a churchyard such as this, and, when the Livery dine, you may hear them (if you are looking in through the iron rails, which you never are when I am) toasting their own Worshipful prosperity. Sometimes, a whole-

sale house of business, requiring much room for stowage, will occupy one or two, or even all three, sides of the enclosing space, and the backs of bales of goods will lumber up the windows, as if they were holding some crowded trade-meeting of themselves within. Sometimes, the commanding windows are all blank, and show no more sign of life than the graves below—not so much, for *they* tell of what once upon a time was life undoubtedly. Such was the surrounding of one City churchyard that I saw last summer, on a Volunteering Saturday evening towards eight of the clock, when with astonishment I beheld an old old man and an old old woman in it, making hay. Yes, of all occupations in this world, making hay! It was a very confined patch of churchyard lying between Gracechurch Street and the Tower, capable of yielding, say, an apronful of hay. By what means the old old man and woman had got into it, with an almost toothless hay-making rake, I could not fathom. No open window was within view; no window at all was within view, sufficiently near the ground to have enabled their old legs to descend from it; the rusty churchyard gate was locked, the mouldy church was locked. Gravely among the graves they made hay, all alone by themselves. They looked like Time and his wife. There was but the one rake between them, and they both had hold of it in a pastorally-loving manner, and there was hay on the old woman's black bonnet, as if the old man had recently been playful. The old man was quite an obsolete old man, in knee breeches and coarse grey stockings, and the old woman wore mittens like unto his stockings in texture and in colour. They took no heed of me as I looked on, unable to account for them. The old woman was much too bright for a pew-opener, the old man much too meek for a beadle. On an old tombstone in the foreground, between me and them, were two cherubim: but for those celestial embellishments being represented as having no possible use for knee breeches, stockings, or mittens, I should have compared them with the hay-makers, and sought a likeness. I coughed and awoke the echoes, but the hay-makers never looked at me. They used the rake with a measured action, drawing the scanty crop towards them; and so I was fain to leave them under three yards and a half of darkening sky, gravely making hay among the graves, all alone by themselves. Perhaps they were Spectres, and I wanted a medium.

In another City churchyard, of similar cramped dimensions, I saw, that selfsame summer, two comfortable charity children. They

were making love—tremendous proof of the vigour of that immortal article, for they were in the graceful uniform under which English Charity delights to hide herself—and they were overgrown, and their legs (his legs, at least, for I am modestly incompetent to speak of hers) were as much in the wrong as mere passive weakness of character can render legs. Oh, it was a leaden churchyard, but no doubt a golden ground to those young persons! I first saw them on a Saturday evening, and, perceiving from their occupation that Saturday evening was their trysting-time, I returned that evening se'nnight, and renewed the contemplation of them. They came there to shake the bits of matting which were spread in the church aisles, and they afterwards rolled them up, he rolling his end, she rolling hers, until they met, and over the two once divided now united rolls—sweet emblem!—gave and received a chaste salute. It was so refreshing to find one of my faded churchyards blooming into flower thus, that I returned a second time, and a third, and ultimately this befell:—They had left the church-door open in their dusting and arranging. Walking in to look at the church, I became aware, by the dim light, of him in the pulpit, of her in the reading-desk, of him looking down, of her looking up, exchanging tender discourse. Immediately both dived, and became as it were non-existent on this sphere. With an assumption of innocence I turned to leave the sacred edifice, when an obese form stood in the portal, puffily demanding Joseph, or, in default of Joseph, Celia. Taking this monster by the sleeve, and luring him forth on pretence of showing him whom he sought, I gave time for the emergence of Joseph and Celia, who presently came towards us in the churchyard, bending under dusty matting, a picture of thriving and unconscious industry. It would be superfluous to hint that I have ever since deemed this the proudest passage in my life.

But such instances, or any tokens of vitality, are rare indeed in my City churchyards. A few sparrows occasionally try to raise a lively chirrup in their solitary tree—perhaps, as taking a different view of worms from that entertained by humanity—but they are flat and hoarse of voice, like the clerk, the organ, the bell, the clergyman, and all the rest of the church-works when they are wound up for Sunday. Caged larks, thrushes, or blackbirds, hanging in neighbouring courts, pour forth their strains passionately, as scenting the tree, trying to break out, and see leaves again before they die, but their song is Willow, Willow—of a churchyard cast. So little

light lives inside the churches of my churchyards, when the two are co-existent, that it is often only by an accident, and after long acquaintance, that I discover their having stained glass in some odd window. The westerling sun slants into the churchyard by some unwonted entry, a few prismatic tears drop on an old tombstone, and a window that I thought was only dirty is for the moment all jewelled. Then the light passes and the colours die. Though even then, if there be room enough for me to fall back so far as that I can gaze up to the top of the church tower, I see the rusty vane new burnished, and seeming to look out with a joyful flash over the sea of smoke at the distant shore of country.

Blinking old men, who are let out of work-houses by the hour, have a tendency to sit on bits of coping-stone in these churchyards, leaning with both hands on their sticks, and asthmatically gasping. The more depressed class of beggars, too, bring hither broken meats, and munch. I am on nodding terms with a meditative turncock who lingers in one of them, and whom I suspect of a turn for poetry; the rather as he looks out of temper when he gives the fire-plug a disparaging wrench with that large tuning-fork of his which would wear out the shoulder of his coat, but for a precautionary piece of inlaid leather. Fire-ladders, which I am satisfied nobody knows anything about, and the keys of which were lost in ancient times, moulder away in the larger churchyards, under eaves like wooden eyebrows; and so removed are those corners from the haunts of men and boys, that once, on a fifth of November, I found a "Guy" trusted to take care of himself there, while his proprietors had gone to dinner. Of the expression of his face I cannot report, because it was turned to the wall; but his shrugged shoulders and his ten extended fingers appeared to denote that he had moralised, in his little straw chair, on the mystery of mortality until he gave it up as a bad job.

You do not come upon these churchyards violently; there are shades of transition in the neighbourhood. An antiquated news shop, or barber's shop, apparently bereft of customers in the earlier days of George the Third, would warn me to look out for one, if any discoveries in this respect were left for me to make. A very quiet court, in combination with an unaccountable dyer's and scourer's, would prepare me for a churchyard. An exceedingly retiring public-house, with a bagatelle board sadly visible in a sawdusty parlour-shaped like an omnibus, and with a shelf of punch-bowls in the bar, would apprise

me that I stood near consecrated ground. A "Dairy," exhibiting in its modest window one very little milk-can and three eggs, would suggest to me the certainty of finding the poultry hard by, pecking at my forefathers. I first inferred the vicinity of St. Ghastly Grim from a certain air of extra repose and gloom pervading a vast stack of warehouses.

From the hush of these places it is congenial to pass into the hushed resorts of business. Down the lanes I like to see the carts and waggons huddled together in repose, the cranes idle, and the warehouses shut. Pausing in the alleys behind the closed Banks of mighty Lombard Street, it gives one as good as a rich feeling to think of the broad counters with a rim along the edge, made for telling money out on, the scales for weighing precious metals, the ponderous ledgers, and, above all, the bright copper shovels for shovelling gold. When I draw money, it never seems so much money as when it is shovelled at me out of a bright copper shovel. I like to say, "In Gold," and to see seven pounds musically pouring out of the shovel, like seventy; the Bank appearing to remark to me—I italicise *appearing*—"If you want more of this yellow earth, we keep it in barrows at your service." To think of the banker's clerk with his deft finger turning the crisp edges of the Hundred-Pound Notes he has taken in a fat roll out of a drawer, is again to hear the rustling of that delicious south-cash wind. "How will you have it?" I once heard this usual question asked at a Bank Counter of an elderly female, habited in mourning and steeped in simplicity, who answered, open-eyed, crook-fingered, laughing with expectation, "Any-how!" Calling these things to mind as I stroll among the Banks, I wonder whether the other solitary Sunday man I pass has designs upon the Banks. For the interest and mystery of the matter, I almost hope he may have, and that his confederate may be at this moment taking impressions of the keys of the iron closets in wax, and that a delightful robbery may be in course of transaction. About College Hill, Mark Lane, and so on towards the Tower, and Dockward, the deserted wine merchants' cellars are fine subjects for consideration; but the deserted money-cellars of the Bankers, and their plate-cellars, and their jewel-cellars, what subterranean regions of the Wonderful Lamp are these! And again: possibly some shoeless boy in rags passed through this street yesterday, for whom it is reserved to be a Banker in the fulness of time, and to be surpassing rich. Such reverses have been since the days of Whittington;

and were long before. I want to know whether the boy has any foreglittering of that glittering fortune now, when he treads these stones hungry. Much as I also want to know whether the next man to be hanged at Newgate yonder had any suspicion upon him that he was moving steadily towards that fate, when he talked so much about the last man who paid the same great debt at the same small Debtors' Door.

Where are all the people who on busy working-days pervade these scenes? The locomotive banker's clerk, who carries a black portfolio chained to him by a chain of steel, where is he? Does he go to bed with his chain on—to church with his chain on—or does he lay it by? And if he lays it by, what becomes of his portfolio, when he is unchained for a holiday? The waste-paper baskets of these closed counting-houses would let me into many hints of business matters if I had the exploration of them; and what secrets of the heart should I discover on the "pads" of the young clerks—the sheets of cartridge-paper and blotting-paper interposed between their writing and their desks! Pads are taken into confidence on the tenderest occasions, and oftentimes when I have made a business visit, and have sent in my name from the outer office, have I had it forced on my discursive notice that the officiating young gentleman has over and over again inscribed AMELIA, in ink of various dates, on corners of his pad. Indeed, the pad may be regarded as the legitimate modern successor of the old forest tree: whereon these young knights (having no attainable forest nearer than Epping) engrave the names of their mistresses. After all, it is a more satisfactory process than carving, and can be oftener repeated. So these courts in their Sunday rest are courts of Love Omnipotent (I rejoice to bethink myself), dry as they look. And here is Garraway's, bolted and shuttered hard and fast! It is possible to imagine the man who cuts the sandwiches, on his back in a hay-field; it is possible to imagine his desk, like the desk of a clerk at church, without him; but imagination is unable to pursue the men who wait at Garraway's all the week for the men who never come. When they are forcibly put out of Garraway's on Saturday night—which they must be, for they never would go out of their own accord—where do they vanish until Monday morning? On the first Sunday that I ever strayed here, I expected to find them hovering about these lanes, like restless ghosts, and trying to peep into Garraway's through chinks in the shutters, if not endeavouring to turn the lock of the door with false keys, picks, and screw-drivers. But the

wonder is, that they go clean away! And now I think of it, the wonder is, that every working-day pervader of these scenes goes clean away. The man who sells the dogs' collars and the little toy coal-scuttles feels under as great an obligation to go afar off as Glyn and Co., or Smith, Payne, and Smith. There is an old monastery crypt under Garraway's (I have been in it among the port wine), and perhaps Garraway's, taking pity on the mouldy men who wait in its public-room all their lives, gives them cool house room down there over Sundays; but the catacombs of Paris would not be large enough to hold the rest of the missing. This characteristic of London City greatly helps its being the quaint place it is in the weekly pause of business, and greatly helps my Sunday sensation in it of being the Last Man. In my solitude, the ticket porters being all gone with the rest, I venture to breathe to the quiet bricks and stones my confidential wonderment why a ticket porter, who never does any work with his hands, is bound to wear a white apron, and why a great Ecclesiastical Dignitary, who never does any work with his hands either, is equally bound to wear a black one.

XXII.

AN OLD STAGE-COACHING HOUSE.

BEFORE the waitress had shut the door, I had forgotten how many stage-coaches she said used to change horses in the town every day. But it was of little moment; any high number would do as well as another. It had been a great stage-coaching town in the great stage-coaching times, and the ruthless railways had killed and buried it.

The sign of the house was the Dolphin's Head. Why only head, I don't know; for the Dolphin's effigy at full length, and upside down—as a Dolphin is always bound to be when artistically treated, though I suppose he is sometimes right side upward in his natural condition—graced the sign-board. The sign-board chafed its rusty hooks outside the bow-window of my room, and was a shabby work. No visitor could have denied that the Dolphin was dying by inches, but he showed no bright colours. He had once served another master; there was a newer streak of paint below him, displaying with inconsistent freshness the legend, By J. MELLOWS.

My door opened again, and J. Mellows's representative came back. I had asked her what

I could have for dinner, and she now returned with the counter-question, what would I like? As the Dolphin stood possessed of nothing that I do like, I was fain to yield to the suggestion of a duck, which I don't like. J. Mellows's representative was a mournful young woman, with one eye susceptible of guidance, and one uncontrollable eye; which latter, seeming to wander in quest of stage-coaches, deepened the melancholy in which the Dolphin was steeped.

This young woman had but shut the door on retiring again, when I bethought me of adding to my order the words, "with nice vegetables." Looking out at the door to give them emphatic utterance, I found her already in a state of pensive catalepsy in the deserted gallery, picking her teeth with a pin.

At the Railway Station, seven miles off, I had been the subject of wonder when I ordered a fly in which to come here. And when I gave the direction, "To the Dolphin's Head," I had observed an ominous stare on the countenance of the strong young man in velveteen, who was the platform servant of the Company. He had also called to my driver at parting, "All right! Don't hang yourself when you get there, Geo-o-ge!" in a sarcastic tone, for which I had entertained some transitory thoughts of reporting him to the General Manager.

I had no business in the town—I never have any business in any town—but I had been caught by the fancy that I would come and look at it in its degeneracy. My purpose was fitly inaugurated by the Dolphin's Head, which everywhere expressed past coachfulness and present coachlessness. Coloured prints of coaches starting, arriving, changing horses, coaches in the sunshine, coaches in the snow, coaches in the wind, coaches in the mist and rain, coaches on the King's birthday, coaches in all circumstances compatible with their triumph and victory, but never in the act of breaking down or overturning, pervaded the house. Of these works of art, some, framed and not glazed, had holes in them; the varnish of others had become so brown and cracked, that they looked like overdone pie-crust; the designs of others were almost obliterated by the flies of many summers. Broken glasses, damaged frames, lop-sided hanging, and consignment of incurable cripples to places of refuge in dark corners, attested the desolation of the rest. The old room on the ground-floor, where the passengers of the Highflyer used to dine, had nothing in it but a wretched show of twigs and flower-pots in the broad window to hide the nakedness of the land, and in a corner little Mellows's perambulator, with even its para-

sol head turned despondently to the wall. The other room, where post-horse company used to wait while relays were getting ready down the yard, still held its ground, but was as airless as I conceive a hearse to be: inasmuch that Mr. Pitt, hanging high against the partition (with spots on him like port wine, though it is mysterious how port wine ever got squirted up there), had good reason for perking his nose and sniffing. The stopperless cruets on the spindle-shanket sideboard were in a miserably dejected state; the anchovy sauce having turned blue some years ago, and the cayenne pepper (with a scoop in it like a small model of a wooden leg) having turned solid. The old fraudulent candles, which were always being paid for and never used, were burnt out at last; but their tall stilted of candlesticks still lingered, and still outraged the human intellect by pretending to be silver. The mouldy old unreformed Borough Member, with his right hand buttoned up in the breast of his coat, and his back characteristically turned on bales of petitions from his constituents, was there too; and the poker which never had been among the fire-irons, lest post-horse company should over-stir the fire, was *not* there, as of old.

Pursuing my researches in the Dolphin's Head, I found it sorely shrunken. When J. Mellows came into possession, he had walled off half the bar, which was now a tobacco shop with its own entrance in the yard—the once-glorious yard where the postboys, whip in hand and always buttoning their waistcoats at the last moment, used to come running forth to mount and away. A "Scientific Shoeing Smith and Veterinary Surgeon" had further encroached upon the yard; and a grimly satirical Jobber, who announced himself as having to Let "A neat one-horse fly, and a one-horse cart," had established his business, himself, and his family, in a part of the extensive stables. Another part was lopped clean off from the Dolphin's Head, and now comprised a chapel, a wheelwright's, and a Young Men's Mutual Improvement and Discussion Society (in a loft): the whole forming a back-lane. No audacious hand had plucked down the vane from the central cupola of the stables, but it had grown rusty and stuck at N—Nil: while the score or two of pigeons that remained true to their ancestral traditions and the place, had collected in a row on the roof-ridge of the only outhouse retained by the Dolphin, where all the inside pigeons tried to push the outside pigeon off. This I accepted as emblematical of the struggle for post and place in railway times.

Sauntering forth into the town, by way of the

covered and pillared entrance to the Dolphin's Yard, once redolent of soup and stable litter, now redolent of musty disuse, I paced the street. It was a hot day, and the little sun-blinds of the shops were all drawn down, and the more enterprising tradesmen had caused their 'prentices to trickle water on the pavement appertaining to their frontage. It looked as if they had been shedding tears for the stage-coaches, and drying their ineffectual pocket-handkerchiefs. Such weakness would have been excusable; for business was—as one dejected porkman, who kept a shop which refused to reciprocate the compliment by keeping him, informed me—"bitter bad." Most of the harness-makers and corn-dealers were gone the way of the coaches, but it was a pleasant recognition of the eternal procession of Children down that old original steep Incline, the Valley of the Shadow, that those tradesmen were mostly succeeded by vendors of sweetmeats and cheap toys. The opposition house to the Dolphin, once famous as the New White Hart, had long collapsed. In a fit of abject depression, it had cast whitewash on its windows, and boarded up its front-door, and reduced itself to a side-entrance; but even that had proved a world too wide for the Literary Institution which had been its last phase; for the Institution had collapsed too, and of the ambitious letters of its inscription on the White Hart's front, all had fallen off but these:

L Y I N S T

—suggestive of Lamentably Insolvent. As to the neighbouring market-place, it seemed to have wholly relinquished marketing to the dealer in crockery whose pots and pans straggled half across it, and to the Cheap Jack who sat with folded arms on the shafts of his cart, superciliously gazing around; his velveteen waistcoat evidently harbouring grave doubts whether it was worth his while to stay a night in such a place.

The church bells began to ring as I left this spot, but they by no means improved the case, for they said, in a petulant way, and speaking with some difficulty in their irritation, "WHAT'S-be-come-of-THE-coach-ES?" Nor would they (I found on listening) ever vary their emphasis, save in respect of growing more sharp and vexed, but they invariably went on, "WHAT'S-be-come-of-THE-coach-ES?"—always beginning the inquiry with an unpolite abruptness. Perhaps from their elevation they saw the railway, and it aggravated them.

Coming upon a coachmaker's workshop, I began to look about me with a revived spirit, thinking that perchance I might behold there

some remains of the old times of the town's greatness. There was only one man at work—a dry man, grizzled, and far advanced in years, but tall and upright, who, becoming aware of me looking on, straightened his back, pushed up his spectacles against his brown-paper cap, and appeared inclined to defy me. To whom I pacifically said:

"Good day, sir!"

"What?" said he.

"Good day, sir."

He seemed to consider about that, and not to agree with me.—"Was you a looking for anything?" he then asked in a pointed manner.

"I was wondering whether there happened to be any fragment of an old stage-coach here."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"No, there ain't."

It was now my turn to say "Oh!" and I said it. Not another word did the dry and grizzled man say, but bent to his work again. In the coachmaking days, the coach painters had tried their brushes on a post beside him; and quite a Calendar of departed glories was to be read upon it, in blue and yellow and red and green, some inches thick. Presently he looked up again.

"You seem to have a deal of time on your hands," was his querulous remark.

I admitted the fact.

"I think it's a pity you was not brought up to something," said he.

I said I thought so too.

Appearing to be informed with an idea, he laid down his plane (for it was a plane he was at work with), pushed up his spectacles again, and came to the door.

"Would a po-shay do for you?" he asked.

"I am not sure that I understand what you mean."

"Would a po-shay," said the coachmaker, standing close before me, and folding his arms in the manner of a cross-examining counsel—"would a po-shay meet the views you have expressed? Yes, or no?"

"Yes."

"Then you keep straight along down there till you see one. You'll see one if you go fur enough."

With that he turned me by the shoulder in the direction I was to take, and went in and resumed his work against a background of leaves and grapes. For, although he was a soured man and a discontented, his workshop was that agreeable mixture of town and country, street and garden, which is often to be seen in a small English town.

I went the way he turned me, and I came to the Beer-shop with the sign of The First and Last, and was out of the town on the old London Road. I came to the turnpike and I found it, in its silent way, eloquent reflecting the change that had fallen on the road. The Turnpike-house was all overgrown with ivy; and the Turnpike-keeper, unable to get a living out of the tolls, plied the trade of a cobbler. Not only that, but his wife sold ginger-beer, and, in the very window of espial through which the Toll-takers of old times used with awe to behold the grand London coaches coming on at a gallop, exhibited for sale little barbers' poles of sweetstuff in a sticky lantern.

The political economy of the master of the turnpike thus expressed itself.

"How goes turnpike business, master?" said I to him, as he sat in his little porch, repairing a shoe.

"It don't go at all, master," said he to me. "It's stopped."

"That's bad," said I.

"Bad?" he repeated. And he pointed to one of his sunburnt dusty children who was climbing the turnpike-gate, and said, extending his open right hand in remonstrance with Universal Nature, "Five on 'em!"

"But how to improve Turnpike business?" said I.

"There's a way, master," said he, with the air of one who had thought deeply on the subject.

"I should like to know it."

"Lay a toll on everything as comes through; lay a toll on walkers. Lay another toll on everything as don't come through; lay a toll on them as stops at home."

"Would the last remedy be fair?"

"Fair? Them as stops at home could come through if they liked; couldn't they?"

"Say they could."

"Toll 'em. If they don't come through, it's *their* look-out. Anyways,—Toll 'em!"

Finding it was as impossible to argue with this financial genius as if he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer, and consequently the right man in the right place, I passed on meekly.

My mind now began to misgive me that the disappointed coachmaker had sent me on a wild-goose errand, and that there was no post-chaise in those parts. But coming within view of certain allotment gardens by the roadside, I retracted the suspicion, and confessed that I had done him an injustice. For, there I saw, surely, the poorest superannuated post-chaise left on earth.

It was a post-chaise taken off its axletree and wheels, and plumped down on the clayey soil among a ragged growth of vegetables. It was a post-chaise not even set straight upon the ground, but tilted over, as if it had fallen out of a balloon. It was a post-chaise that had been a long time in those decayed circumstances, and against which scarlet-beans were trained. It was a post-chaise patched and mended with old tea-trays, or with scraps of iron that looked like them, and boarded up as to the windows, but having a KNOCKER on the off-side door. Whether it was a post-chaise used as tool-house, summer-house, or dwelling-house, I could not discover, for there was nobody at home at the post-chaise when I knocked; but it was certainly used for something, and looked up. In the wonder of this discovery, I walked round and round the post-chaise many times, and sat down by the post-chaise, waiting for further elucidation. None came. At last, I made my way back to the old London Road by the further end of the allotment gardens, and consequently at a point beyond that from which I had diverged. I had to scramble through a hedge and down a steep bank, and I nearly came down atop of a little spare man who sat breaking stones by the roadside.

He stayed his hammer, and said, regarding me mysteriously through his dark goggles of wire:

"Are you aware, sir, that you've been trespassing?"

"I turned out of the way," said I in explanation, "to look at that odd post-chaise. Do you happen to know anything about it?"

"I know it was many a year upon the road," said he.

"So I supposed. Do you know to whom it belongs?"

The stone-breaker bent his brows and goggles over his heap of stones, as if he were considering whether he should answer the question or not. Then, raising his barred eyes to my features as before, he said:

"To me."

Being quite unprepared for the reply, I received it with a sufficiently awkward "Indeed! Dear me!" Presently I added, "Do you——" I was going to say "live there," but it seemed so absurd a question, that I substituted "live near here?"

The stone-breaker, who had not broken a fragment since we began to converse, then did as follows. He raised himself by poising his figure on his hammer, and took his coat, on which he had been seated, over his arm. He then backed to an easier part of the bank than

that by which I had come down, keeping his dark goggles silently upon me all the time, and then shouldered his hammer, suddenly turned, ascended, and was gone. His face was so small, and his goggles were so large, that he left me wholly uninformed as to his countenance; but he left me a profound impression that the curved legs I had seen from behind, as he vanished, were the legs of an old postboy. It was not until then that I noticed he had been working by a grass-grown milestone, which looked like a tombstone erected over the grave of the London Road.

My dinner hour being close at hand, I had no leisure to pursue the goggles or the subject then, but made my way back to the Dolphin's Head. In the gateway I found J. Mellows, looking at nothing, and apparently experiencing that it failed to raise his spirits.

"I don't care for the town," said J. Mellows when I complimented him on the sanitary advantages it may or may not possess; "I wish I had never seen the town!"

"You don't belong to it, Mr. Mellows?"

"Belong to it!" repeated Mellows. "If I didn't belong to a better style of town than this, I'd take and drown myself in a pail." It then occurred to me that Mellows, having so little to do, was habitually thrown back on his internal resources—by which I mean the Dolphin's cellar.

"What we want," said Mellows, pulling off his hat, and making as if he emptied it of the last load of Disgust that had exuded from his brain, before he put it on again for another load; "what we want is a Branch. The Petition for the Branch Bill is in the coffee-room. Would you put your name to it? Every little helps."

I found the document in question stretched out flat on the coffee-room table by the aid of certain weights from the kitchen, and I gave it the additional weight of my uncommercial signature. To the best of my belief, I bound myself to the modest statement that universal traffic, happiness, prosperity, and civilisation, together with unbounded national triumph in competition with the foreigner, would infallibly flow from the Branch.

Having achieved this constitutional feat, I asked Mr. Mellows if he could grace my dinner with a pint of good wine? Mr. Mellows thus replied:

"If I couldn't give you a pint of good wine, I'd—there!—I'd take and drown myself in a pail. But I was deceived when I bought this business, and the stock was higgledy-piggledy, and I haven't yet tasted my way quite through

it with a view to sorting it. Therefore, if you order one kind and get another, change till it comes right. For what," said Mellows, unloading his hat as before, "what would you or any gentleman do, if you ordered one kind of wine, and was required to drink another? Why, you'd (and naturally and properly, having the feelings of a gentleman), you'd take and drown yourself in a pail!"

XXIII.

THE BOILED BEEF OF NEW ENGLAND.

THE shabbiness of our English capital, as compared with Paris, Bordeaux, Frankfort, Milan, Geneva—almost any important town on the continent of Europe—I find very striking after an absence of any duration in foreign parts. London is shabby in contrast with Edinburgh, with Aberdeen, with Exeter, with Liverpool, with a bright little town like Bury St. Edmunds. London is shabby in contrast with New York, with Boston, with Philadelphia. In detail, one would say it can rarely fail to be a disappointing piece of shabbiness to a stranger from any of those places. There is nothing shabbier than Drury Lane in Rome itself. The meanness of Regent Street, set against the great line of Boulevards in Paris, is as striking as the abortive ugliness of Trafalgar Square, set against the gallant beauty of the Place de la Concorde. London is shabby by daylight, and shabbier by gas-light. No Englishman knows what gas-light is until he sees the Rue de Rivoli and the Palais Royal after dark.

The mass of London people are shabby. The absence of distinctive dress has, no doubt, something to do with it. The porters of the Vintners' Company, the draymen, and the butchers, are about the only people who wear distinctive dresses; and even these do not wear them on holidays. We have nothing which, for cheapness, cleanliness, convenience, or picturesque-ness, can compare with the belted blouse. As to our women;—next Easter or Whitsuntide, look at the bonnets at the British Museum or the National Gallery, and think of the pretty white French cap, the Spanish mantilla, or the Genoese mezzero.

Probably there are not more second-hand clothes sold in London than in Paris, and yet the mass of the London population have a

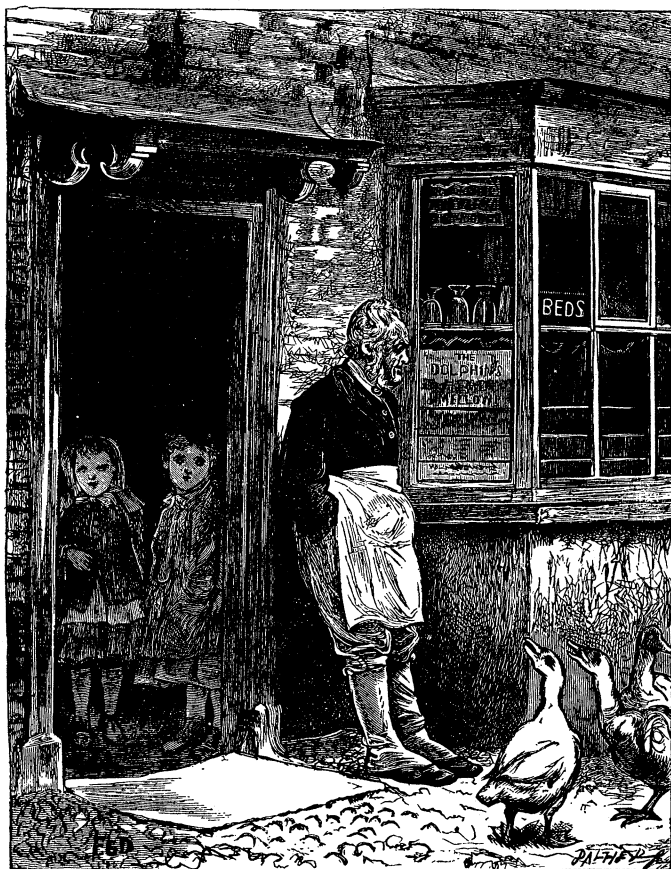
second-hand look which is not to be detected on the mass of the Parisian population. I think this is mainly because a Parisian workman does not in the least trouble himself about what is worn by a Parisian idler, but dresses in the way of his own class, and for his own comfort. In London, on the contrary, the fashions descend; and you never fully know how inconvenient or ridiculous a fashion is until you see it in its last descent. It was but the other day, on a race-course, that I observed four people in a barouche deriving great entertainment from the contemplation of four people on foot. The four people on foot were two young men and two young women; the four people in the barouche were two young men and two young women. The four young women were dressed in exactly the same style; the four young men were dressed in exactly the same style. Yet the two couples on wheels were as much amused by the two couples on foot as if they were quite unconscious of having themselves set those fashions, or of being at that very moment engaged in the display of them.

Is it only in the matter of clothes that fashion descends here in London—and consequently in England—and thence shabbiness arises? Let us think a little, and be just. The "Black Country" round about Birmingham is a very black country; but is it quite as black as it has been lately painted? An appalling accident happened at the People's Park, near Birmingham, this last July, when it was crowded with people from the Black Country—an appalling accident consequent on a shamefully dangerous exhibition. Did the shamefully dangerous exhibition originate in the moral blackness of the Black Country, and in the Black People's peculiar love of the excitement attendant on great personal hazard, which they looked on at, but in which they did not participate? Light is much wanted in the Black Country. Oh! we are all agreed on that. But, we must not quite forget the crowds of gentlefolks who set the shamefully dangerous fashion, either. We must not quite forget the enterprising Directors of an Institution vaunting mighty educational pretences, who made the low sensation as strong as they possibly could make it, by hanging the Blondin rope as high as they possibly could hang it. All this must not be eclipsed in the Blackness of the Black Country. The reserved seats high up by the rope, the cleared space below it, so that no one should be smashed but the performer, the pretence of slipping and falling off, the baskets for the feet and the sack for the head, the photographs everywhere, and the virtuous indignation nowhere—all this must not

be wholly swallowed up in the blackness of the jet-black country.

Whatsoever fashion is set in England is certain to descend. This is a text for a perpetual sermon on care in setting fashions. When you find a fashion low down, look back for the time

(it will never be far off) when it was the fashion high up. This is the text for a perpetual sermon on social justice. From imitations of Ethiopian Serenaders to imitations of Princes' coats and waistcoats, you will find the original model in St. James's Parish. When the Serenaders become



MR. J. MELLOWS.

tiresome, trace them beyond the Black Country; when the coats and waistcoats become insupportable, refer them to their source in the Upper Toady Regions.

Gentlemen's clubs were once maintained for purposes of savage party warfare; working-men's

clubs of the same day assumed the same character. Gentlemen's clubs became places of quiet inoffensive recreation; working-men's clubs began to follow suit. If working-men have seemed rather slow to appreciate advantages of combination which have saved the pockets of gentle-

men, and enhanced their comforts, it is because working-men could scarcely, for want of capital, originate such combinations without help; and because help has not been separable from that great impertinence, Patronage. The instinctive revolt of his spirit against patronage is a quality much to be respected in the English working-man. It is the base of the base of his best qualities. Nor is it surprising that he should be unduly suspicious of patronage, and sometimes resentful of it even where it is not, seeing what a flood of washy talk has been let loose on his devoted head, or with what complacent condescension the same devoted head has been smoothed and patted. It is a proof to me of his self-control that he never strikes out pugilistically, right and left, when addressed as one of "My friends," or "My assembled friends;" that he does not become inappeasable, and run a-muck like a Malay, whenever he sees a biped in broadcloth getting on a platform to talk to him; that any pretence of improving his mind does not instantly drive him out of his mind, and cause him to toss his obliging patron like a mad bull.

For, how often have I heard the unfortunate working-man lectured as if he were a little charity child, humid as to his nasal development, strictly literal as to his catechism, and called by Providence to walk all his days in a station in life represented on festive occasions by a mug of warm milk-and-water and a bun! What pop-guns of jokes have these ears tingled to hear let off at him, what asinine sentiments, what impotent conclusions, what spelling-book moralities, what adaptations of the orator's insufferable tediousness to the assumed level of his understanding! If his sledge-hammers, his spades and pickaxes, his saws and chisels, his paint pots and brushes, his forges, furnaces, and engines, the horses that he drove at his work, and the machines that drove him at his work, were all toys in one little paper box, and he the baby who played with them, he could not have been discoursed to more impertinently and absurdly than I have heard him discoursed to times innumerable. Consequently, not being a fool or a fawner, he has come to acknowledge his patronage by virtually saying: "Let me alone. If you understand me no better than *that*, sir and madam, let me alone. You mean very well, I dare say, but I don't like it, and I won't come here again to have any more of it."

Whatever is done for the comfort and advancement of the working-man must be so far done by himself as that it is maintained by himself. And there must be in it no touch of conde-

scension, no shadow of patronage. In the great working districts this truth is studied and understood. When the American civil war rendered it necessary, first in Glasgow, and afterwards in Manchester, that the working-people should be shown how to avail themselves of the advantages derivable from system, and from the combination of numbers, in the purchase and the cooking of their food, this truth was above all things borne in mind. The quick consequence was, that suspicion and reluctance were vanquished, and that the effort resulted in an astonishing and a complete success.

Such thoughts passed through my mind on a July morning of this summer, as I walked towards Commercial Street (not Uncommercial Street), Whitechapel. The Glasgow and Manchester system had been lately set a-going there, by certain gentlemen who felt an interest in its diffusion, and I had been attracted by the following handbill printed on rose-coloured paper:

SELF-SUPPORTING COOKING DEPOT,

FOR THE WORKING CLASSES,

Commercial Street, Whitechapel,

Where Accommodation is provided for Dining comfortably 300 persons at a time.

Open from 7 A.M. till 7 P.M.

PRICES.

All Articles of the BEST QUALITY.

Cup of Tea or Coffee	One Penny
Bread and Butter	One Penny
Bread and Cheese	One Penny
Slice of Bread One halfpenny or	One Penny
Boiled Egg	One Penny
Ginger Beer	One Penny

The above Articles always ready.

Besides the above may be had, from
12 to 3 o'clock,

Bowl of Scotch Broth	One Penny
Bowl of Soup	One Penny
Plate of Potatoes	One Penny
Plate of Minced Beef	Twopence
Plate of Cold Beef	Twopence
Plate of Cold Ham	Twopence
Plate of Plum Pudding or Rice	One Penny

As the Economy of Cooking depends greatly upon the simplicity of the arrangements with which a great number of persons can be served,

at one time, the Upper Room of this Establishment will be especially set apart for a

PUBLIC DINNER EVERY DAY

From 12 till 3 o'clock,

Consisting of the following Dishes :

Bowl of Broth, or Soup,
Plate of Cold Beef or Ham,
Plate of Potatoes,
Plum Pudding, or Rice.

FIXED CHARGE 4½d.

THE DAILY PAPERS PROVIDED.

N.B.—This Establishment is conducted on the strictest business principles, with the full intention of making it self-supporting, so that every one may frequent it with a feeling of perfect independence.

The assistance of all frequenting the Dépôt is confidently expected in checking anything interfering with the comfort, quiet, and regularity of the establishment.

Please do not destroy this Handbill, but hand it to some other person whom it may interest.

This Self-Supporting Cooking Depot (not a very good name, and one would rather give it an English one) had hired a newly-built warehouse that it found to let; therefore it was not established in premises especially designed for the purpose. But, at a small cost, they were exceedingly well adapted to the purpose: being light, well ventilated, clean, and cheerful. They consisted of three large rooms. That on the basement story was the kitchen; that on the ground-floor was the general dining-room; that on the floor above was the Upper Room referred to in the handbill, where the Public Dinner at fourpence-halfpenny a head was provided every day. The cooking was done, with much economy of space and fuel, by American cooking stoves, and by young women not previously brought up as cooks; the walls and pillars of the two dining-rooms were agreeably brightened with ornamental colours; the tables were capable of accommodating six or eight persons each; the attendants were all young women, becomingly and neatly dressed, and dressed alike. I think the whole staff was female with the exception of the steward or manager.

My first inquiries were directed to the wages of this staff; because, if any establishment claiming to be self-supporting live upon the spoliation of anybody or anything, or eke out a feeble

existence by poor mouths and beggarly resources (as too many so-called Mechanics' Institutions do), I make bold to express my uncommercial opinion that it has no business to live, and had better die. It was made clear to me, by the account books, that every person employed was properly paid. My next inquiries were directed to the quality of the provisions purchased, and to the terms on which they were bought. It was made equally clear to me that the quality was the very best, and that all bills were paid weekly. My next inquiries were directed to the balance-sheet for the last two weeks—only the third and fourth of the establishment's career. It was made equally clear to me, that after everything bought was paid for, and after each week was charged with its full share of wages, rent and taxes, depreciation of plant in use, and interest on capital at the rate of four per cent. per annum, the last week had yielded a profit of (in round numbers) one pound ten; and the previous week a profit of six pounds ten. By this time I felt that I had a healthy appetite for the dinners.

It had just struck twelve, and a quick succession of faces had already begun to appear at a little window in the wall of the partitioned space where I sat looking over the books. Within this little window, like a pay-box at a theatre, a neat and brisk young woman presided to take money and issue tickets. Every one coming in must take a ticket. Either the fourpence-halfpenny ticket for the upper room (the most popular ticket, I think), or a penny ticket for a bowl of soup, or as many penny tickets as he or she chose to buy. For three penny tickets one had quite a wide range of choice. A plate of cold boiled beef and potatoes; or a plate of cold ham and potatoes; or a plate of hot minced beef and potatoes; or a bowl of soup, bread and cheese, and a plate of plum-pudding. Touching what they should have, some customers, on taking their seats, fell into a reverie—became mildly distracted—postponed decision, and said, in bewilderment, they would think of it. One old man I noticed when I sat among the tables in the lower room, who was startled by the bill of fare, and sat contemplating it as if it were something of a ghostly nature. The decision of the boys was as rapid as their execution, and always included pudding.

There were several women among the diners, and several clerks and shopmen. There were carpenters and painters from the neighbouring buildings under repair, and there were nautical men, and there were, as one diner observed to me, "some of most sorts." Some were solitary,

some came two together, some dined in parties of three or four, or six. The latter talked together, but assuredly no one was louder than at my club in Pall Mall. One young fellow whistled in rather a shrill manner while he waited for his dinner, but I was gratified to observe that he did so in evident defiance of my uncommercial individuality. Quite agreeing with him, on consideration, that I had no business to be there, unless I dined like the rest, I "went in," as the phrase is, for fourpence-halfpenny.

The room of the fourpence-halfpenny banquet had, like the lower room, a counter in it, on which were ranged a great number of cold portions ready for distribution. Behind this counter the fragrant soup was steaming in deep cans, and the best-cooked of potatoes were fished out of similar receptacles. Nothing to eat was touched with the hand. Every waitress had her own tables to attend to. As soon as she saw a new customer seat himself at one of her tables, she took from the counter all his dinner—his soup, potatoes, meat, and pudding—piled it up dexterously in her two hands, set it before him, and took his ticket. This serving of the whole dinner at once had been found greatly to simplify the business of attendance, and was also popular with the customers: who were thus enabled to vary the meal by varying the routine of dishes: beginning with soup to-day, putting soup in the middle to-morrow, putting soup at the end the day after to-morrow, and ringing similar changes on meat and pudding. The rapidity with which every new-comer got served was remarkable; and the dexterity with which the waitresses (quite new to the art a month before) discharged their duty was as agreeable to see, as the neat smartness with which they wore their dress and had dressed their hair.

If I seldom saw better waiting, so I certainly never ate better meat, potatoes, or pudding. And the soup was an honest and stout soup, with rice and barley in it, and "little matters for the teeth to touch," as had been observed to me by my friend below-stairs already quoted. The dinner service, too, was neither conspicuously hideous for High Art nor for Low Art, but was of a pleasant and pure appearance. Concerning the viands and their cookery, one last remark. I dined at my club in Pall Mall aforesaid, a few days afterwards, for exactly twelve times the money, and not half as well.

The company thickened after one o'clock struck, and changed pretty quickly. Although experience of the place had been so recently attainable, and although there was still considerable curiosity out in the street and about

the entrance, the general tone was as good as could be, and the customers fell easily into the ways of the place. It was clear to me, however, that they were there to have what they paid for, and to be on an independent footing. To the best of my judgment, they might be patronised out of the building in a month. With judicious visiting, and by dint of being questioned, read to, and talked at, they might even be got rid of (for the next quarter of a century) in half the time.

This disinterested and wise movement is fraught with so many wholesome changes in the lives of the working-people, and with so much good in the way of overcoming that suspicion which our own unconscious impertinence has engendered, that it is scarcely gracious to criticise details as yet; the rather because it is indisputable that the managers of the Whitechapel establishment most thoroughly feel that they are upon their honour with the customers, as to the minutest points of administration. But, although the American stoves cannot roast, they can surely boil one kind of meat as well as another, and need not always circumscribe their boiling talents within the limits of ham and beef. The most enthusiastic admirer of those substantialists would probably not object to occasional inconstancy in respect of pork and mutton: or, especially in cold weather, to a little innocent trifling with Irish stews, meat-pies, and toads-in-holes. Another drawback on the Whitechapel establishment is the absence of beer. Regarded merely as a question of policy, it is very impolitic, as having a tendency to send the working-man to the public-house, where gin is reported to be sold. But, there is a much higher ground on which this absence of beer is objectionable. It expresses distrust of the working-man. It is a fragment of that old mantle of patronage in which so many estimable Thugs, so darkly wandering up and down the moral world, are sworn to muffle him. Good beer is a good thing for him, he says, and he likes it; the *Dépôt* could give it him good, and he now gets it bad. Why does the *Dépôt* not give it him good? Because he would get drunk. Why does the *Dépôt* not let him have a pint with his dinner, which would not make him drunk? Because he might have had another pint, or another two pints, before he came. Now, this distrust is an affront, is exceedingly inconsistent with the confidence the managers express in their handbills, and is a timid stopping-short upon the straight highway. It is unjust and unreasonable, also. It is unjust, because it punishes the sober man for the vice of the drunken man. It is unreasonable, because any one at all experienced

in such things knows that the drunken workman does not get drunk where he goes to eat and drink, but where he goes to drink—expressly to drink. To suppose that the working-man cannot state this question to himself quite as plainly as I state it here, is to suppose that he is a baby, and is again to tell him, in the old wearisome condescending patronising way, that he must be goody-poodly, and do as he is toldy-poldy, and not be a manny-panny or a voter-poter, but fold his handy-pandys, and be a childy-pildy.

I found, from the accounts of the Whitechapel Self-Supporting Cooking Dépôt, that every article sold in it, even at the prices I have quoted, yields a certain small profit! Individual speculators are of course already in the field, and are of course already appropriating the name. The classes for whose benefit the real dépôts are designed will distinguish between the two kinds of enterprise.

XXIV.

CHATHAM DOCKYARD.

THERE are some small out-of-the-way landing-places on the Thames and the Medway, where I do much of my summer idling. Running water is favourable to day dreams, and a strong tidal river is the best of running water for mine. I like to watch the great ships standing out to sea or coming home richly laden, the active little steam-tugs confidently puffing with them to and from the sea horizon, the fleet of barges that seem to have plucked their brown and russet sails from the ripe trees in the landscape, the heavy old colliers, light in ballast, floundering down before the tide, the light screw barks and schooners imperiously holding a straight course while the others patiently tack and go about, the yachts with their tiny hulls and great white sheets of canvas, the little sailing-boats bobbing to and fro on their errands of pleasure or business, and—as it is the nature of little people to do—making a prodigious fuss about their small affairs. Watching these objects, I still am under no obligation to think about them, or even so much as to see them, unless it perfectly suits my humour. As little am I obliged to hear the plash and flop of the tide, the ripple at my feet, the clinking windlass afar off, or the humming steam-ship paddles further away yet. These, with the creaking little jetty on which I sit, and

the gaunt high-water marks and low-water marks in the mud, and the broken causeway, and the broken bank, and the broken stakes and piles leaning forward as if they were vain of their personal appearance, and looking for their reflection in the water, will melt into any train of fancy. Equally adaptable to any purpose, or to none, are the pasturing sheep and kine upon the marshes, the gulls that wheel and dip around me, the crows (well out of gun-shot) going home from the rich harvest-fields, the heron that has been out a fishing, and looks as melancholy, up there in the sky, as if it hadn't agreed with him. Everything within the range of the senses will, by the aid of the running water, lend itself to everything beyond that range, and work into a drowsy whole, not unlike a kind of tune, but for which there is no exact definition.

One of these landing-places is near an old fort (I can see the Nore Light from it with my pocket-glass), from which fort mysteriously emerges a boy, to whom I am much indebted for additions to my scanty stock of knowledge. He is a young boy, with an intelligent face burnt to a dust colour by the summer sun, and with crisp hair of the same hue. He is a boy in whom I have perceived nothing incompatible with habits of studious inquiry and meditation, unless an evanescent black eye (I was delicate of inquiring how occasioned) should be so considered. To him am I indebted for ability to identify a Custom-House boat at any distance, and for acquaintance with all the forms and ceremonies observed by a homeward-bound Indian-man coming up the river, when the Custom-House officers go aboard her. But for him, I might never have heard of the "dumb-ague," respecting which malady I am now learned. Had I never sat at his feet, I might have finished my mortal career, and never known that when I see a white horse on a barge's sail, that barge is a lime barge. For precious secrets in reference to beer am I likewise beholden to him, involving warning against the beer of a certain establishment, by reason of its having turned sour through failure in point of demand: though my young sage is not of opinion that similar deterioration has befallen the ale. He has also enlightened me touching the mushrooms of the marshes, and has gently reproved my ignorance in having supposed them to be impregnated with salt. His manner of imparting information is thoughtful, and appropriate to the scene. As he reclines beside me, he pitches into the river a little stone or piece of grit, and then delivers himself oracularly, as though he spoke out of the centre of the spreading circle that it makes in

the water. He never improves my mind without observing this formula.

With the wise boy—whom I know by no other name than the Spirit of the Fort—I recently consorted on a breezy day, when the river leaped about us and was full of life. I had seen the sheaved corn carrying in the golden fields as I came down to the river; and the rosy farmer, watching his labouring men in the saddle on his cob, had told me how he had reaped his two hundred and sixty acres of long-strawed corn last week, and how a better week's work he had never done in all his days. Peace and abundance were on the country-side in beautiful forms and beautiful colours, and the harvest seemed even to be sailing out to grace the never-reaped sea in the yellow laden barges that mellowed the distance.

It was on this occasion that the Spirit of the Fort, directing his remarks to a certain floating iron battery lately lying in that reach of the river, enriched my mind with his opinions on naval architecture, and informed me that he would like to be an engineer. I found him up to everything that is done in the contracting line by Messrs. Peto and Brassey—cunning in the article of concrete—mellow in the matter of iron—great on the subject of gunnery. When he spoke of pile-driving and sluice-making, he left me not a leg to stand on, and I can never sufficiently acknowledge his forbearance with me in my disabled state. While he thus discoursed, he several times directed his eyes to one distant quarter of the landscape, and spoke with vague, mysterious awe of "the Yard." Pondering his lessons after we had parted, I bethought me that the Yard was one of our large public Dockyards, and that it lay hidden among the crops down in the dip behind the windmills, as if it modestly kept itself out of view in peaceful times, and sought to trouble no man. Taken with this modesty on the part of the Yard, I resolved to improve the Yard's acquaintance.

My good opinion of the Yard's retiring character was not dashed by nearer approach. It resounded with the noise of hammers beating upon iron; and the great sheds or slips, under which the mighty men-of-war are built, loomed business-like when contemplated from the opposite side of the river. For all that, however, the Yard made no display, but kept itself snug under hill-sides of corn-fields, hop gardens, and orchards; its great chimneys smoking with a quiet—almost a lazy—air, like giants smoking tobacco; and the great Shears, moored off it, looking meekly and inoffensively out of proportion, like the Giraffe of the machinery creation.

THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER, 9.

The store of cannon on the neighbouring gun wharf had an innocent toy-like appearance, and the one red-coated sentry on duty over them was a mere toy figure, with a clockwork movement. As the hot sun-light sparkled on him, he might have passed for the identical little man who had the little gun, and whose bullets they were made of lead, lead, lead.

Crossing the river and landing at the Stairs, where a drift of chips and weed had been trying to land before me, and had not succeeded, but had got into a corner instead, I found the very street posts to be cannon, and the architectural ornaments to be shells. And so I came to the Yard, which was shut up tight and strong with great folded gates, like an enormous patent safe. These gates devouring me, I became digested into the Yard; and it had, at first, a clean-swept holiday air, as if it had given over work until next war-time. Though, indeed, a quantity of hemp for rope was tumbling out of storehouses, even there, which would hardly be lying like so much hay on the white stones if the Yard were as placid as it pretended.

Ding, Clash, Dong, BANG, Boom, Rattle, Clash, BANG, Clink, BANG, Dong, BANG, Clatter, BANG BANG BANG! What on earth is this? This is, or soon will be, the Achilles, iron armour-plated ship. Twelve hundred men are working at her now; twelve hundred men working on stages over her sides, over her bows, over her stern, under her keel, between her decks, down in her hold, within her and without, crawling and creeping into the finest curves of her lines wherever it is possible for men to twist. Twelve hundred hammerers, measurers, calkers, armourers, forgers, smiths, shipwrights; twelve hundred dingers, clashers, dongers, rattlers, clinkers, bangers bangers! Yet all this stupendous uproar around the rising Achilles is as nothing to the reverberations with which the perfected Achilles shall resound upon the dreadful day when the full work is in hand for which this is but note of preparation—the day when the scuppers, that are now fitting like great dry thirsty conduit-pipes, shall run red. All these busy figures between-decks, dimly seen bending at their work in smoke and fire, are as nothing to the figures that shall do work here of another kind, in smoke and fire, that day. These steam-worked engines alongside, helping the ship by travelling to and fro, and wafting tons of iron plates about, as though they were so many leaves of trees, would be rent limb from limb if they stood by here for a minute then. To think that this Achilles, monstrous compound of iron tank and oaken chest, can ever swim or roll! To

think that any force of wind and wave could ever break her ! To think that wherever I see a glowing red-hot iron point thrust out of her side from within—as I do now, there, and there, and there !—and two watching men on a stage without, with bared arms and sledge-hammers, strike at it fiercely, and repeat their blows until it is black and flat, I see a rivet being driven home, of which there are many in every iron plate, and thousands upon thousands in the ship ! To think that the difficulty I experience in appreciating the ship's size, when I am on board, arises from her being a series of iron tanks and oaken chests, so that internally she is ever finishing and ever beginning, and half of her might be smashed, and yet the remaining half suffice and be sound ! Then, to go over the side again, and down among the ooze and wet to the bottom of the dock, in the depths of the subterranean forest of dog-shores and stays that hold her up, and to see the immense mass bulging out against the upper light, and tapering down towards me, is, with great pains and much clambering, to arrive at an impossibility of realising that this is a ship at all, and to become possessed by the fancy that it is an enormous immovable edifice set up in an ancient amphitheatre (say, that at Verona), and almost filling it ! Yet what would even these things be, without the tributary workshops and the mechanical powers for piercing the iron plates—four inches and a half thick—for rivets, shaping them under hydraulic pressure to the finest tapering turns of the ship's lines, and paring them away, with knives shaped like the beaks of strong and cruel birds, to the nicest requirements of the design ? These machines of tremendous force, so easily directed by one attentive face and presiding hand, seem to me to have in them something of the retiring character of the Yard. "Obedient monster, please to bite this mass of iron through and through, at equal distances, where these regular chalk-marks are, all round." Monster looks at its work, and, lifting its ponderous head, replies, "I don't particularly want to do it ; but if it must be done——!" The solid metal wriggles out, hot from the monster's crunching tooth, and it is done. "Dutiful monster, observe this other mass of iron. It is required to be pared away, according to this delicately lessening and arbitrary line, which please to look at." Monster (who has been in a reverie) brings down its blunt head, and, much in the manner of Doctor Johnson, closely looks along the line—very closely, being somewhat near-sighted. "I don't particularly want to do it ; but if it must be done——!" Monster takes another

near-sighted look, takes aim, and the tortured piece writhes off, and falls, a hot tight-twisted snake, among the ashes. The making of the rivets is merely a pretty round game, played by a man and a boy, who put red-hot barley-sugar in a Pope Joan board, and immediately rivets fall out of window ; but the tone of the great machines is the tone of the great Yard and the great country : "We don't particularly want to do it ; but if it must be done——!"

How such a prodigious mass as the Achilles can ever be held by such comparatively little anchors as those intended for her, and lying near her here, is a mystery of seamanship which I will refer to the wise boy. For my own part, I should as soon have thought of tethering an elephant to a tent-peg, or the larger hippopotamus in the Zoological Gardens to my shirt-pin. Yonder in the river, alongside a hulk, lie two of this ship's hollow iron masts. *They* are large enough for the eye, I find, and so are all her other appliances. I wonder why only her anchors look small.

I have no present time to think about it, for I am going to see the workshops where they make all the oars used in the British Navy. A pretty large pile of building, I opine, and a pretty long job ! As to the building, I am soon disappointed, because the work is all done in one loft. And as to a long job—what is this ? Two rather large mangles, with a swarm of butterflies hovering over them ? What can there be in the mangles that attracts butterflies ?

Drawing nearer, I discern that these are not mangles, but intricate machines, set with knives and saws and planes, which cut smooth and straight here, and slantwise there, and now cut such a depth, and now miss cutting altogether, according to the predestined requirements of the pieces of wood that are pushed on below them : each of which pieces is to be an oar, and is roughly adapted to that purpose before it takes its final leave of far-off forests, and sails for England. Likewise I discern that the butterflies are not true butterflies, but wooden shavings, which, being spurted up from the wood by the violence of the machinery, and kept in rapid and not equal movement by the impulse of its rotation on the air, flutter and play, and rise and fall, and conduct themselves as like butterflies as heart could wish. Suddenly the noise and motion cease, and the butterflies drop dead. An oar has been made since I came in, wanting the shaped handle. As quickly as I can follow it with my eye and thought, the same oar is carried to a turning lathe. A whirl and a Nick ! Handle made. Oar finished.

The exquisite beauty and efficiency of this machinery need no illustration, but happen to have a pointed illustration to-day. A pair of oars of unusual size chance to be wanted for a special purpose, and they have to be made by hand. Side by side with the subtle and facile machine, and side by side with the fast-growing pile of oars on the floor, a man shapes out these special oars with an axe. Attended by no butterflies, and chipping and dinting, by comparison as leisurely as if he were a labouring Pagan getting them ready against his decease at threescore-and-ten, to take with him as a present to Charon for his boat, the man (aged about thirty) plies his task. The machine would make a regulation oar while the man wipes his forehead. The man might be buried in a mound made of the strips of thin broad wooden ribbon torn from the wood whirled into oars as the minutes fall from the clock, before he had done a forenoon's work with his axe.

Passing from this wonderful sight to the Ships again—for my heart, as to the Yard, is where the ships are—I notice certain unfinished wooden walls left seasoning on the stocks, pending the solution of the merits of the wood and iron? question, and having an air of biding their time with surly confidence. The names of these worthies are set up beside them, together with their capacity in guns—a custom highly conducive to ease and satisfaction in social intercourse, if it could be adapted to mankind. By a plank more gracefully pendulous than substantial, I make bold to go aboard a transport ship (iron screw) just sent in from the contractor's yard to be inspected and passed. She is a very gratifying experience, in the simplicity and humanity of her arrangements for troops, in her provision for light and air and cleanliness, and in her care for women and children. It occurs to me, as I explore her, that I would require a handsome sum of money to go aboard her, at midnight by the Dockyard bell, and stay aboard alone till morning; for surely she must be haunted by a crowd of ghosts of obstinate old martinets, mournfully flapping their cherubic epaulets over the changed times. Though still we may learn, from the astounding ways and means in our Yards now, more highly than ever to respect the forefathers who got to sea, and fought the sea, and held the sea, without them. This remembrance putting me in the best of tempers with an old hulk, very green as to her copper, and generally dim and patched, I pull off my hat to her. Which salutation a callow and downy-faced young officer of Engineers, going by at the moment, perceiving, appropri-

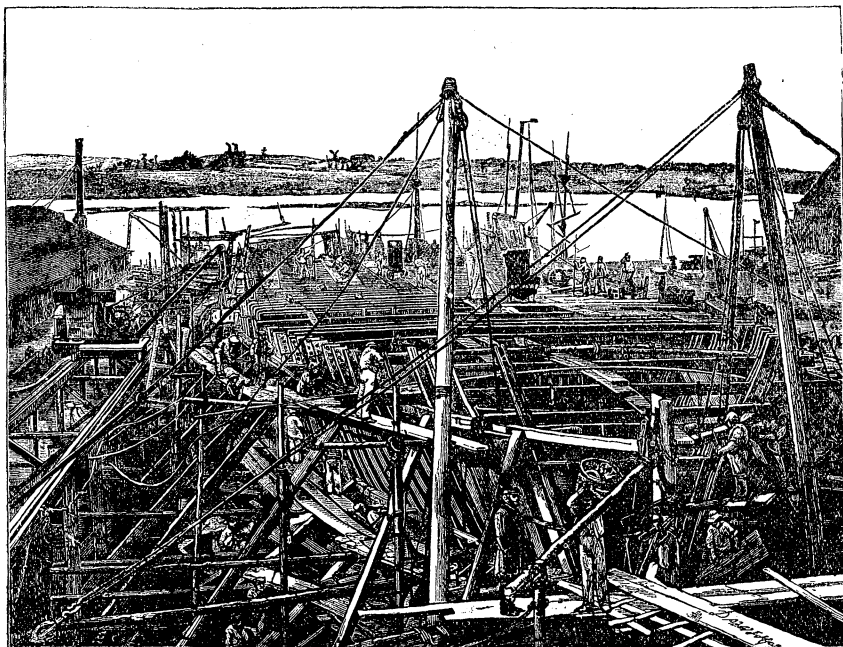
ates—and to which he is most heartily welcome, I am sure.

Having been torn to pieces (in imagination) by the steam circular saws, perpendicular saws, horizontal saws, and saws of eccentric action, I come to the sauntering part of my expedition, and consequently to the core of my uncommercial pursuits.

Everywhere, as I saunter up and down the Yard, I meet with tokens of its quiet and retiring character. There is a gravity upon its red brick offices and houses, a staid pretence of having nothing worth mentioning to do, an avoidance of display, which I never saw out of England. The white stones of the pavement present no other trace of Achilles and his twelve hundred banging men (not one of whom strikes an attitude) than a few occasional echoes. But for a whisper in the air suggestive of sawdust and shavings, the oar-making and the saws of many movements might be miles away. Down below here is the great reservoir of water where timber is steeped in various temperatures, as a part of its seasoning process. Above it, on a tramroad supported by pillars, is a Chinese Enchanter's Car, which fishes the logs up, when sufficiently steeped, and rolls smoothly away with them to stack them. When I was a child (the Yard being then familiar to me), I used to think that I should like to play at Chinese Enchanter, and to have that apparatus placed at my disposal for the purpose by a beneficent country. I still think that I should rather like to try the effect of writing a book in it. Its retirement is complete, and to go gliding to and fro among the stacks of timber would be a convenient kind of travelling in foreign countries—among the forests of North America, the sodden Honduras swamps, the dark pine woods, the Norwegian frosts, and the tropical heats, rainy seasons, and thunder-storms. The costly store of timber is stacked and stowed away in sequestered places, with the pervading avoidance of flourish or effect. It makes as little of itself as possible, and calls to no one, "Come and look at me!" And yet it is picked out from the trees of the world; picked out for length, picked out for breadth, picked out for straightness, picked out for crookedness, chosen with an eye to every need of ship and boat. Strangely-twisted pieces lie about, precious in the sight of shipwrights. Sauntering through these groves, I come upon an open glade where workmen are examining some timber recently delivered. Quite a pastoral scene, with a background of river and windmill! and no more like War than the American States are at present like a Union.

Sauntering among the ropemaking, I am spun into a state of blissful indolence, wherein my rope of life seems to be so untwisted by the process as that I can see back to very early days indeed, when my bad dreams—they were frightful, though my more mature understanding has never made out why—were of an interminable sort of ropemaking, with long minute filaments for strands, which, when they were spun home together close to my eyes, occasioned screaming. Next I walk among the quiet lofts of

stores—of sails, spars, rigging, ships' boats—determined to believe that somebody in authority wears a girdle, and bends beneath the weight of a massive bunch of keys, and that, when such a thing is wanted, he comes telling his keys like Blue Beard, and opens such a door. Impassive as the long lofts look, let the electric battery send down the word, and the shutters and doors shall fly open, and such a fleet of armed ships, under steam and under sail, shall burst forth as will charge the old Medway—



BUILDING H.M.S. ACHILLES.

where the merry Stuart let the Dutch come, while his not so merry sailors starved in the streets—with something worth looking at to carry to the sea. Thus I idle round to the Medway again, where it is now flood tide; and I find the river evincing a strong solicitude to force a way into the dry dock where Achilles is waited on by the twelve hundred bangers, with the intent to bear the whole away before they are ready.

To the last, the Yard puts a quiet face upon it; for I make my way to the gates through a

little quiet grove of trees; shading the quaintest of Dutch landing-places, where the leaf-speckled shadow of a shipwright just passing away at the further end might be the shadow of Russian Peter himself. So, the doors of the great patent safe at last close upon me, and I take boat again: somehow, thinking, as the oars dip, of braggart Pistol and his brood, and of the quiet monsters of the Yard, with their "We don't particularly want to do it; but if it must be done——!" Scrunch.

XXV.

IN THE FRENCH-FLEMISH COUNTRY.

IT is neither a bold nor a diversified country," said I to myself, "this country which is three-quarters Flemish, and a quarter French; yet it has its attractions, too. Though great lines of railway traverse it, the trains leave it behind, and go puffing off to Paris and the South, to Belgium and Germany, to the Northern Sea-Coast of France, and to England, and merely smoke it a little in passing. Then I don't know it, and that is a good reason for being here; and I can't pronounce half the long queer names I see inscribed over the shops, and that is another good reason for being here, since I surely ought to learn how." In short, I was "here," and I wanted an excuse for not going away from here, and I made it to my satisfaction, and stayed here.

What part in my decision was borne by Monsieur P. Salcy is of no moment, though I own to encountering that gentleman's name on a red bill on the wall before I made up my mind. Monsieur P. Salcy, "par permission de M. le Maire," had established his theatre in the white-washed Hôtel de Ville, on the steps of which illustrious edifice I stood. And Monsieur P. Salcy, privileged director of such theatre, situate in "the first theatrical arrondissement of the department of the North," invited French-Flemish mankind to come and partake of the intellectual banquet provided by his family of dramatic artists, fifteen subjects in number. "*La Famille P. SALCY, composée d'artistes dramatiques, au nombre de 15 sujets.*"

Neither a bold nor a diversified country, I say again, and withal an untidy country, but pleasant enough to ride in, when the paved roads over the flats and through the hollows are not too deep in black mud. A country so sparsely inhabited, that I wonder where the peasants who till and sow and reap the ground can possibly dwell, and also by what invisible balloons they are conveyed from their distant homes into the fields at sunrise, and back again at sunset. The occasional few poor cottages and farms in this region surely cannot afford shelter to the numbers necessary to the cultivation, albeit the work is done so very deliberately, that on one long harvest-day I have seen, in twelve miles, about twice as many men and women (all told) reaping and binding. Yet have I seen more cattle, more sheep, more pigs, and all in better case, than where there is purer French spoken, and also

better ricks—round swelling pegtop ricks, well thatched: not a shapeless brown heap, like the toast of a Giant's toast-and-water, pinned to the earth with one of the skewers out of his kitchen. A good custom they have about here, likewise, of prolonging the sloping tiled roof of farm or cottage, so that it overhangs three or four feet, carrying off the wet, and making a good drying-place wherein to hang up herbs, or implements, or what not. A better custom than the popular one of keeping the refuse-heap and puddle close before the house-door: which, although I paint my dwelling never so brightly blue (and it cannot be too blue for me hereabouts), will bring fever inside my door. Wonderful poultry of the French-Flemish country, why take the trouble to *be* poultry? Why not stop short at eggs in the rising generation, and die out and have done with it? Parents of chickens have I seen this day, followed by their wretched young families, scratching nothing out of the mud with an air—tottering about on legs so scraggy and weak, that the valiant word drum-sticks becomes a mockery when applied to them, and the crow of the lord and master has been a mere dejected case of croup. Carts have I seen, and other agricultural instruments, unwieldy, dislocated, monstrous. Poplar-trees by the thousand fringe the fields and fringe the end of the flat landscape, so that I feel, looking straight on before me, as if, when I pass the extremest fringe on the low horizon, I shall tumble over into space. Little whitewashed black holes of chapels, with barred doors and Flemish inscriptions, abound at roadside corners, and often they are garnished with a sheaf of wooden crosses, like children's swords; or, in their default, some hollow old tree, with a saint roosting in it, is similarly decorated, or a pole with a very diminutive saint enshrined aloft in a sort of sacred pigeon-house. Not that we are deficient in such decoration in the town here, for, over at the church yonder, outside the building, is a scenic representation of the Crucifixion, built up with old bricks and stones, and made out with painted canvas and wooden figures: the whole surmounting the dusty skull of some holy personage (perhaps), shut up behind a little ashy iron grate, as if it were originally put there to be cooked, and the fire had long gone out. A windmilly country this, though the windmills are so damp and rickety, that they nearly knock themselves off their legs at every turn of their sails, and creak in loud complaint. A weaving country, too, for in the wayside cottages the loom goes wearily—rattle and click, rattle and click—and, looking in, I see the poor weaving peasant, man or

woman, bending at the work, while the child, working too, turns a little hand-wheel put upon the ground to suit its height. An unconscionable monster, the loom in a small dwelling asserting himself ungenerously as the bread-winner, straddling over the children's straw beds, cramping the family in space and air, and making himself generally objectionable and tyrannical. He is tributary, too, to ugly mills and factories and bleaching-grounds, rising out of the sluiced fields in an abrupt bare way, disdaining, like himself, to be ornamental or accommodating. Surrounded by these things, here I stood on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville, persuaded to remain by the P. Salcy Family, fifteen dramatic subjects strong.

There was a Fair besides. The double persuasion being irresistible, and my sponge being left behind at the last Hotel, I made the tour of the little town to buy another. In the small sunny shops—mercers, opticians, and druggist-grocers, with here and there an emporium of religious images—the gravest of old spectacted Flemish husbands and wives sat contemplating one another across bare counters, while the wasps, who seemed to have taken military possession of the town, and to have placed it under wasp-martial law, executed warlike manoeuvres in the windows. Other shops the wasps had entirely to themselves, and nobody cared and nobody came when I beat with a five-franc piece upon the board of custom. What I sought was no more to be found than if I had sought a nugget of Californian gold: so I went, spongeless, to pass the evening with the Family P. Salcy.

The members of the Family P. Salcy were so fat and so like one another—fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, and aunts—that I think the local audience were much confused about the plot of the piece under representation, and to the last expected that everybody must turn out to be the long-lost relative of everybody else. The theatre was established on the top story of the Hôtel de Ville, and was approached by a long bare staircase, whereon, in an airy situation, one of the P. Salcy Family—a stout gentleman, imperfectly repressed by a belt—took the money. This occasioned the greatest excitement of the evening; for, no sooner did the curtain rise on the introductory Vaudeville, and reveal in the person of the young lover (singing a very short song with his eyebrows) apparently the very same identical stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, than everybody rushed out to the paying-place to ascertain whether he could possibly have put on that dress-coat, that clear complexion, and those arched black vocal eyebrows, in so short a space of time. It then became

manifest that this was another stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt: to whom, before the spectators had recovered their presence of mind, entered a third stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, exactly like him. These two “subjects,” making with the money-taker three of the announced fifteen, fell into conversation touching a charming young widow: who, presently appearing, proved to be a stout lady altogether irrepressible by any means—quite a parallel case to the American Negro—fourth of the fifteen subjects, and sister of the fifth who presided over the check department. In good time the whole of the fifteen subjects were dramatically presented, and we had the inevitable *Ma Mère*, *Ma Mère*! and also the inevitable *malédiction d'un père*, and likewise the inevitable *Marquis*, and also the inevitable provincial young man, weak-minded, but faithful, who followed Julie to Paris, and cried and laughed and choked all at once. The story was wrought out with the help of a virtuous spinning-wheel in the beginning, a vicious set of diamonds in the middle, and a rheumatic blessing (which arrived by post) from *Ma Mère* towards the end; the whole resulting in a small sword in the body of one of the stout gentlemen imperfectly repressed by a belt, fifty thousand francs per annum and a decoration to the other stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, and an assurance from everybody to the provincial young man that if he were not supremely happy—which he seemed to have no reason whatever for being—he ought to be. This afforded him a final opportunity of crying and laughing and choking all at once, and sent the audience home sentimentally delighted. Audience more attentive or better behaved there could not possibly be, though the places of second rank in the Theatre of the Family P. Salcy were sixpence each in English money, and the places of first rank a shilling. How the fifteen subjects ever got so fat upon it, the kind Heavens know.

What gorgeous china figures of knights and ladies, gilded till they gleamed again, I might have bought at the Fair for the garniture of my home, if I had been a French-Flemish peasant, and had had the money! What shining coffee-cups and saucers I might have won at the turntables, if I had had the luck! Ravishing perfumery also, and sweetmeats, I might have speculated in, or I might have fired for prizes at a multitude of little dolls in niches, and might have hit the doll of dolls, and won francs and fame. Or, being a French-Flemish youth, I might have been drawn in a hand-cart by my compeers, to tilt for municipal rewards at the

water-quintain ; which, unless I sent my lance clean through the ring, emptied a full bucket over me ; to fend off which the competitors wore grotesque old scarecrow hats. Or, being French-Flemish man or woman, boy or girl, I might have circled all night on my hobby-horse in a stately cavalcade of hobby-horses four abreast, interspersed with triumphal cars, going round and round and round and round, we the goodly company singing a ceaseless chorus to the music of the barrel-organ, drum, and cymbals. On the whole, not more monotonous than the Ring in Hyde Park, London, and much merrier ; for when do the circling company sing chorus *there* to the barrel-organ, when do the ladies embrace their horses round the neck with both arms, when do the gentlemen fan the ladies with the tails of their gallant steeds ? On all these revolving delights, and on their own especial lamps and Chinese lanterns revolving with them, the thoughtful weaver-face brightens, and the Hôtel de Ville sheds an illuminated line of gas-light ; while above it, the Eagle of France, gas-outlined and apparently afflicted with the prevailing infirmities that have lighted on the poultry, is in a very undecided state of policy, and as a bird moulting. Flags flutter all around. Such is the prevailing gaiety that the keeper of the prison sits on the stone steps outside the prison door, to have a look at the world that is not locked up ; while that agreeable retreat, the wine-shop opposite to the prison in the prison alley (its sign *La Tranquillité*, because of its charming situation), resounds with the voices of the shepherds and shepherdesses who resort there this festive night. And it reminds me that, only this afternoon, I saw a shepherd in trouble, tending this way over the jagged stones of a neighbouring street. A magnificent sight it was to behold him in his blouse, a feeble little jog-trot rustic, swept along by the wind of two immense gendarmes, in cocked-hats for which the street was hardly wide enough, each carrying a bundle of stolen property that would not have held his shoulder-knot, and clanking a sabre that dwarfed the prisoner.

"Messieurs et mesdames, I present to you at this Fair, as a mark of my confidence in the people of this so-renowned town, and as an act of homage to their good sense and fine taste, the Ventriloquist, the Ventriloquist ! Further, messieurs et mesdames, I present to you the Face-Maker, the Physiognomist, the great Changer of Countenances, who transforms the features that Heaven has bestowed upon him into an endless succession of surprising and extraordinary visagés, comprehending, messieurs et mesdames,

all the contortions, energetic and expressive, of which the human face is capable, and all the passions of the human heart, as Love, Jealousy, Revenge, Hatred, Avarice, Despair ! Hi hi ! Ho ho ! Lu lu ! Come in ! " To this effect, with an occasional smite upon a sonorous kind of tambourine—bestowed with a will, as if it represented the people who won't come in—holds forth a man of lofty and severe demeanour ; a man in stately uniform, gloomy with the knowledge he possesses of the inner secrets of the booth. "Come in, come in ! Your opportunity presents itself to-night ; to-morrow it will be gone for ever. To-morrow morning by the Express Train the railroad will reclaim the Ventriloquist and the Face-Maker ! Algeria will reclaim the Ventriloquist and the Face-Maker ! Yes ! For the honour of their country, they have accepted propositions of a magnitude incredible, to appear in Algeria. See them for the last time before their departure ! We go to commence on the instant. Hi hi ! Ho ho ! Lu lu ! Come in ! Take the money that now ascends, madame ; but, after that, no more, for we commence ! Come in ! "

Nevertheless, the eyes both of the gloomy speaker, and of madame receiving sous in a muslin bower, survey the crowd pretty sharply after the ascending money has ascended, to detect any lingering sous at the turning-point. "Come in, come in ! Is there any more money, madame, on the point of ascending ? If so, we wait for it. If not, we commence ! " The orator looks back over his shoulder to say it, lashing the spectators with the conviction that he beholds, through the folds of the drapery into which he is about to plunge, the Ventriloquist and the Face-Maker. Several sous burst out of pockets and ascend. "Come up, then, messieurs !" exclaims madame in a shrill voice, and beckoning with a bejewelled finger. "Come up ! This presses. Monsieur has commanded that they commence !" Monsieur dives into his Interior, and the last half-dozen of us follow. His Interior is comparatively severe ; his Exterior also. A true Temple of Art needs nothing but seats, drapery, a small table, with two moderator lamps hanging over it, and an ornamental looking-glass let into the wall. Monsieur in uniform gets behind the table, and surveys us with disdain, his forehead becoming diabolically intellectual under the moderators. "Messieurs et mesdames, I present to you the Ventriloquist. He will commence with the celebrated Experience of the bee in the window. The bee, apparently the veritable bee of Nature, will hover in the window and about the room.

He will be with difficulty caught in the hand of Monsieur the Ventriloquist—he will escape—he will again hover—at length he will be recaptured by Monsieur the Ventriloquist, and will be with difficulty put into a bottle. Achieve then, Monsieur!" Here the Proprietor is replaced behind the table by the Ventriloquist, who is thin and sallow, and of a weakly aspect. While the bee is in progress, Monsieur the Proprietor sits apart on a stool, immersed in dark and remote thought. The moment the bee is bottled, he stalks forward, eyes us gloomily as we applaud, and then announces, sternly waving his hand: "The magnificent Experience of the child with the hooping-cough!" The child disposed of, he starts up as before. "The superb and extraordinary Experience of the dialogue between Monsieur Tatambour in his dining-room; and his domestic, Jerome, in the cellar; concluding with the songsters of the grove, and the Concert of domestic Farmyard animals." All this done, and well done, Monsieur the Ventriloquist withdraws, and Monsieur the Face-Maker bursts in, as if his retiring-room were a mile long instead of a yard. A corpulent little man in a large white waistcoat, with a comic countenance, and with a wig in his hand. Irreverent disposition to laugh instantly checked by the tremendous gravity of the Face-Maker, who intimates in his bow that if we expect that sort of thing we are mistaken. A very little shaving-glass with a leg behind it is handed in, and placed on the table before the Face-Maker. "Messieurs et mesdames, with no other assistance than this mirror and this wig, I shall have the honour of showing you a thousand characters." As a preparation, the Face-Maker with both hands gouges himself, and turns his mouth inside out. He then becomes frightfully grave again, and says to the Proprietor, "I am ready!" Proprietor stalks forth from baleful reverie, and announces "The Young Conscript!" Face-Maker claps his wig on, hind side before, looks in the glass, and appears above it as a conscript so very imbecile, and squinting so extremely hard, that I should think the State would never get any good of him. Thunders of applause. Face-Maker dips behind the looking-glass, brings his own hair forward, is himself again, is awfully grave. "A distinguished inhabitant of the Faubourg St. Germain." Face-Maker dips, rises, is supposed to be aged, blear-eyed, toothless, slightly palsied, supernaturally polite, evidently of noble birth. "The oldest member of the Corps of Invalides on the fête-day of his master." Face-Maker dips, rises, wears the wig on one side, has become the feeblest, military bore in existence, and (it is

clear) would lie frightfully about his past achievements, if he were not confined to pantomime. "The Miser!" Face-Maker dips, rises, clutches a bag, and every hair of the wig is on end to express that he lives in continual dread of thieves. "The Genius of France!" Face-Maker dips, rises, wig pushed back and smoothed flat, little cocked-hat (artfully concealed till now) put atop of it, Face-Maker's white waistcoat much advanced, Face-Maker's left hand in bosom of white waistcoat, Face-Maker's right hand behind his back. Thunders. This is the first of three positions of the Genius of France. In the second position, the Face-Maker takes snuff; in the third, rolls up his right hand, and surveys illimitable armies through that pocket-glass. The Face-Maker then, by putting out his tongue, and wearing the wig now in particular, becomes the Village Idiot. The most remarkable feature in the whole of his ingenious performance is, that whatever he does to disguise himself has the effect of rendering him rather more like himself than he was at first.

There were peep-shows in this Fair, and I had the pleasure of recognising several fields of glory with which I became well acquainted a year or two ago as Crimean battles, now doing duty as Mexican victories. The change was neatly effected by some extra smoking of the Russians, and by permitting the camp followers free range in the foreground to despoil the enemy of their uniforms. As no British troops had ever happened to be within sight when the artist took his original sketches, it followed fortunately that none were in the way now.

The Fair wound up with a ball. Respecting the particular night of the week on which the ball took place, I decline to commit myself; merely mentioning that it was held in a stable-yard so very close to the railway, that it is a mercy the locomotive did not set fire to it. (In Scotland I suppose it would have done so.) There, in a tent prettily decorated with looking-glasses and a myriad of toy flags, the people danced all night. It was not an expensive recreation, the price of a double ticket for a cavalier and lady being one-and-threepence in English money, and even of that small sum five-pence was reclaimable for "consommation:" which word I venture to translate into refreshments of no greater strength, at the strongest, than ordinary wine made hot, with sugar and lemon in it. It was a ball of great good-humour and of great enjoyment, though very many of the dancers must have been as poor as the fifteen subjects of the P. Sancy Family.

In short, not having taken my own pet

national pint pot with me to this Fair, I was very well satisfied with the measure of simple enjoyment that it poured into the dull French-Flemish country life. How dull that is, I had an opportunity of considering when the Fair was over—when the tricoloured flags were withdrawn from the windows of the houses on the Place where the Fair was held—when the windows were close shut, apparently until next Fair-time—when the Hôtel de Ville had cut off its gas and put away its eagle—when the two paviors, whom I take to form the entire paving population of the town, were ramming down the stones which had been pulled up for the erection of decorative poles—when the gaoler had slammed his gate, and sulkily locked himself in with his charges. But then, as I paced the ring which marked the track of the departed hobby-horses on the market-place, pondering in my mind how long some hobby-horse^e do leave their tracks in public ways, and how difficult they are to erase, my eyes were greeted with a goodly sight. I beheld four male personages thoughtfully pacing the Place together in the sun-light, evidently not belonging to the town, and having upon them a certain loose cosmopolitan air of not belonging to any town. One was clad in a suit of white canvas, another in a cap and blouse, the third in an old military frock, the fourth in a shapeless dress that looked as if it had been made out of old umbrellas. All wore dust-coloured shoes. My heart beat high; for, in those four male personages, although complexionless and eyebrowless, I beheld four subjects of the Family P. Salcy. Blue-bearded though they were, and bereft of the youthful smoothness of cheek which is imparted by what is termed in Albion a "Whitechapel shave" (and which is, in fact, whitening judiciously applied to the jaws with the palm of the hand), I recognised them. As I stood admiring, there emerged from the yard of a lowly cabaret the excellent Ma Mère, Ma Mère, with the words, "The soup is served;" words which so elated the subject in the canvas suit, that when they all ran in to partake, he went last, dancing with his hands stuck angularly into the pockets of his canvas trousers, after the Pierrot manner. Glancing down the Yard, the last I saw of him was, that he looked in through a window (at the soup, no doubt) on one leg.

Full of this pleasure, I shortly afterwards departed from the town, little dreaming of an addition to my good fortune. But more was in reserve. I went by a train which was heavy with third-class carriages, full of young fellows (well guarded) who had drawn unlucky numbers in the last conscription, and were on their way to a

famous French garrison town, where much of the raw military material is worked up into soldiery. At the station they had been sitting about, in their threadbare homespun blue garments, with their poor little bundles under their arms, covered with dust and clay, and the various soils of France; sad enough at heart, most of them, but putting a good face upon it, and slapping their breasts and singing choruses on the smallest provocation; the gayer spirits shouldering half-loaves of black bread speared upon their walking-sticks. As we went along, they were audible at every station, chorusing wildly out of tune, and feigning the highest hilarity. After awhile, however, they began to leave off singing, and to laugh naturally, while at intervals there mingled with their laughter the barking of a dog. Now, I had to alight short of their destination, and, as that stoppage of the train was attended with a quantity of horn blowing, bell ringing, and proclamation of what Messieurs les Voyageurs were to do, and were not to do, in order to reach their respective destinations, I had ample leisure to go forward on the platform to take a parting look at my recruits, whose heads were all out at window, and who were laughing like delighted children. Then I perceived that a large poodle with a pink nose, who had been their travelling companion and the cause of their mirth, stood on his hind-legs presenting arms on the extreme verge of the platform, ready to salute them as the train went off. This poodle wore a military shako (it is unnecessary to add, very much on one side over one eye), a little military coat, and the regulation white gaiters. He was armed with a little musket and a little sword-bayonet, and he stood presenting arms in perfect attitude, with his unobscured eye on his master or superior officer, who stood by him. So admirable was his discipline, that, when the train moved, and he was greeted with the parting cheers of the recruits, and also with a shower of centimes, several of which struck his shako, and had a tendency to discompose him, he remained staunch on his post until the train was gone. He then resigned his arms to his officer, took off his shako by rubbing his paw over it, dropped on four legs, bringing his uniform coat into the absurdest relations with the overarching skies, and ran about the platform in his white gaiters, wagging his tail to an exceeding great extent. It struck me that there was more waggery than this in the poodle, and that he knew that the recruits would neither get through their exercises, nor get rid of their uniforms, as easily as he; revolving which in my thoughts, and seeking in my pockets some small money to bestow upon

him, I casually directed my eyes to the face of his superior officer, and in him beheld the Face-Maker! Though it was not the way to Algeria, but quite the reverse, the military poodle's Colonel was the Face-Maker in a dark blouse, with a small bundle dangling over his shoulder at the end of an umbrella, and taking a pipe from his breast to smoke as he and the poodle went their mysterious way.

XXVI.

MEDICINE MEN OF CIVILISATION.

MY voyages (in paper boats) among savages often yield me matter for reflection at home. It is curious to trace the savage in the civilised man, and to detect the hold of some savage customs on conditions of society rather boastful of being high above them.

I wonder, is the Medicine Man of the North American Indians never to be got rid of, out of the North American country? He comes into my Wigwam on all manner of occasions, and with the absurdest "Medicine." I always find it extremely difficult, and I often find it simply impossible, to keep him out of my Wigwam. For his legal "Medicine" he sticks upon his head the hair of quadrupeds, and plasters the same with fat, and dirty white powder, and talks a gibberish quite unknown to the men and squaws of his tribe. For his religious "Medicine" he puts on puffy white sleeves, little black aprons, large black waistcoats of a peculiar cut, collarless coats with Medicine button-holes, Medicine stockings and gaiters and shoes, and tops the whole with a highly grotesque Medicinal hat. In one respect, to be sure, I am quite free from him. On occasions when the Medicine Men in general, together with a large number of the miscellaneous inhabitants of his village, both male and female, are presented to the principal Chief, his native "Medicine" is a comical mixture of old odds and ends (hired of traders) and new things in antiquated shapes, and pieces of red cloth (of which he is particularly fond), and white and red and blue paint for the face. The irrationality of this particular Medicine culminates in a mock battle-rush, from which many of the squaws are borne out much dilapidated. I need not observe how unlike this is to a Drawing Room at St. James's Palace.

The African magician I find it very difficult

to exclude from my Wigwam too. This creature takes cases of death and mourning under his supervision, and will frequently impoverish a whole family by his preposterous enchantments. He is a great eater and drinker, and always conceals a rejoicing stomach under a grieving exterior. His charms consist of an infinite quantity of worthless scraps, for which he charges very high. He impresses on the poor bereaved natives, that the more of his followers they pay to exhibit such scraps on their persons for an hour or two (though they never saw the deceased in their lives, and are put in high spirits by his decease), the more honourably and piously they grieve for the dead. The poor people submitting themselves to this conjurer, an expensive procession is formed, in which bits of sticks, feathers of birds, and a quantity of other unmeaning objects besmeared with black paint, are carried in a certain ghastly order of which no one understands the meaning, if it ever had any, to the brink of the grave, and are then brought back again.

In the Tonga Islands everything is supposed to have a soul, so that when a hatchet is irreparably broken they say, "His immortal part has departed; he is gone to the happy hunting-places." This belief leads to the logical sequence that, when a man is buried, some of his eating and drinking vessels, and some of his warlike implements, must be broken and buried with him. Superstitious and wrong, but surely a more respectable superstition than the hire of antic scraps for a show that has no meaning based on any sincere belief.

Let me halt on my Uncommercial road to throw a passing glance on some funeral solemnities that I have seen where North American Indians, African Magicians, and Tonga Islanders are supposed not to be.

Once I dwelt in an Italian city, where there dwelt with me for awhile an Englishman of an amiable nature, great enthusiasm, and no discretion. This friend discovered a desolate stranger mourning over the unexpected death of one very dear to him, in a solitary cottage among the vineyards of an outlying village. The circumstances of the bereavement were unusually distressing; and the survivor, new to the peasants and the country, sorely needed help, being alone with the remains. With some difficulty, but with the strong influence of a purpose at once gentle, disinterested, and determined, my friend—Mr. Kindheart—obtained access to the mourner, and undertook to arrange the burial.

There was a small Protestant cemetery near the city walls, and, as Mr. Kindheart came

back to me, he turned into it and chose the spot. He was always highly flushed when rendering a service unaided, and I knew that to make him happy I must keep aloof from his ministrations. But when at dinner he warmed with the good action of the day, and conceived the brilliant idea of comforting the mourner with "an English funeral," I ventured to intimate that I thought that institution, which was not absolutely sublime at home, might prove a failure in Italian hands. However, Mr. Kindheart was so enraptured with his conception, that he presently wrote down into the town requesting the attendance, with to-morrow's earliest light, of a certain little upholsterer. This upholsterer was famous for speaking the unintelligible local dialect (his own) in a far more unintelligible manner than any other man alive.

When from my bath next morning I overheard Mr. Kindheart and the upholsterer in conference on the top of an echoing staircase; and when I overheard Mr. Kindheart rendering English Undertaking phrases into very choice Italian, and the upholsterer replying in the unknown tongues; and when I furthermore remembered that the local funerals had no resemblance to English funerals; I became in my secret bosom apprehensive. But Mr. Kindheart informed me at breakfast that measures had been taken to insure a signal success.

As the funeral was to take place at sunset, and as I knew to which of the city gates it must tend, I went out at that gate as the sun descended, and walked along the dusty, dusty road. I had not walked far when I encountered this procession.

1. Mr. Kindheart, much abashed; on an immense grey horse.

2. A bright yellow coach and pair, driven by a coachman in bright red velvet knee breeches and waistcoat. (This was the established local idea of State.) Both coach doors kept open by the coffin, which was on its side within, and sticking out at each.

3. Behind the coach, the mourner, for whom the coach was intended, walking in the dust.

4. Concealed behind a roadside well for the irrigation of a garden, the unintelligible Upholsterer, admiring.

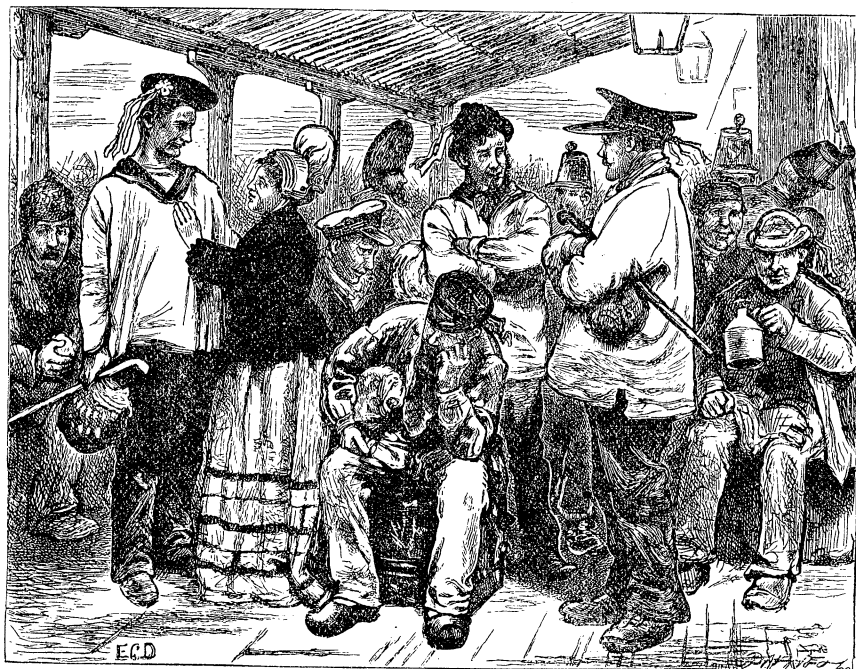
It matters little now. Coaches of all colours are alike to poor Kindheart, and he rests far North of the little cemetery with the cypresses, by the city walls where the Mediterranean is so beautiful.

My first funeral, a fair representative funeral after its kind, was that of the husband of a married servant, once my nurse. She married for

money. Sally Flanders, after a year or two of matrimony, became the relict of Flanders, a small master builder; and either she or Flanders had done me the honour to express a desire that I should "follow." I may have been seven or eight years old;—young enough, certainly, to feel rather alarmed by the expression, as not knowing where the invitation was held to terminate, and how far I was expected to follow the deceased Flanders. Consent being given by the heads of houses, I was jobbed up into what was pronounced at home decent mourning (comprehending somebody else's shirt, unless my memory deceives me), and was admonished that if, when the funeral was in action, I put my hands in my pockets, or took my eyes out of my pocket-handkerchief, I was personally lost, and my family disgraced. On the eventful day, having tried to get myself into a disastrous frame of mind, and having formed a very poor opinion of myself because I couldn't cry, I repaired to Sally's. Sally was an excellent creature, and had been a good wife to old Flanders, but the moment I saw her I knew that she was not in her own real natural state. She formed a sort of Coat-of-Arms, grouped with a smelling-bottle, a handkerchief, an orange, a bottle of vinegar, Flanders's sister, her own sister, Flanders's brother's wife, and two neighbouring gossips—all in mourning, and all ready to hold her whenever she fainted. At sight of poor little me she became much agitated (agitating me much more), and having exclaimed, "Oh, here's dear Master Uncommercial!" became hysterical, and swooned as if I had been the death of her. An affecting scene followed, during which I was handed about and poked at her by various people, as if I were the bottle of salts. Reviving a little, she embraced me, said, "You knew him well, dear Master Uncommercial, and he knew you!" and fainted again: which, as the rest of the Coat-of-Arms soothingly said, "done her credit." Now, I knew that she needn't have fainted unless she liked, and that she wouldn't have fainted unless it had been expected of her, quite as well as I know it at this day. It made me feel uncomfortable and hypocritical besides. I was not sure but that it might be manners in *me* to faint next, and I resolved to keep my eye on Flanders's uncle, and, if I saw any signs of his going in that direction, to go too, politely. But Flanders's uncle (who was a weak little old retail grocer) had only one idea, which was that we all wanted tea; and he handed us cups of tea all round incessantly, whether we refused or not. There was a young nephew of Flanders's present, to

whom Flanders, it was rumoured, had left nineteen guineas. He drank all the tea that was offered him, this nephew—amounting, I should say, to several quarts—and ate as much plum-cake as he could possibly come by; but he felt it to be decent mourning that he should now and then stop in the midst of a lump of cake, and appear to forget that his mouth was full, in the contemplation of his uncle's memory. I felt all this to be the fault of the undertaker,

who was handing us gloves on a tea-tray as if they were muffins, and tying us into cloaks (mine had to be pinned up all round, it was so long for me), because I knew that he was making game. So, when we got out into the streets, and I constantly disarranged the procession by tumbling on the people before me because my handkerchief blinded my eyes, and tripping up the people behind me because my cloak was so long, I felt that we were all making



"AT THE STATION THEY HAD BEEN SITTING ABOUT, IN THEIR THREADBARE HOMESPUN BLUE GARMENTS. . . . SAD ENOUGH AT HEART, MOST OF THEM."

game. I was truly sorry for Flanders, but I knew that it was no reason why we should be trying (the women with their heads in hoods like coal-scuttles with the black side outward) to keep step with a man in a scarf, carrying a thing like a mourning spy-glass, which he was going to open presently, and sweep the horizon with. I knew that we should not all have been speaking in one particular key-note struck by the undertaker, if we had not been making game. Even in our faces we were every one of us as

like the undertaker as if we had been his own family, and I perceived that this could not have happened unless we had been making game. When we returned to Sally's, it was all of a piece. The continued impossibility of getting on without plum-cake; the ceremonious apparition of a pair of decanters containing port and sherry and cork; Sally's sister at the tea-table, clinking the best crockery and shaking her head mournfully every time she looked down into the teapot, as if it were the tomb; the Coat-of-Arms

again, and Sally as before; lastly, the words of consolation administered to Sally when it was considered right that she should "come round nicely:" which were, that the deceased had had "as com-for-ta-ble a fu-ne-ral as comfortable could be!"

Other funerals have I seen with grown-up eyes, since that day, of which the burden has been the same childish burden. Making game. Real affliction; real grief and solemnity, have been outraged, and the funeral has been "performed." The waste for which the funeral customs of many tribes of savages are conspicuous has attended these civilised obsequies; and once, and twice, have I wished in my soul that, if the waste must be, they would let the undertaker bury the money, and let me bury the friend.

In France, upon the whole, these ceremonies are more sensibly regulated, because they are, upon the whole, less expensively regulated. I cannot say that I have ever been much edified by the custom of tying a bib and apron on the front of the house of mourning, or that I would myself particularly care to be driven to my grave in a nodding and bobbing car, like an infirm four-post bedstead, by an inky fellow-creature in a cocked-hat. But it may be that I am constitutionally insensible to the virtues of a cocked-hat. In provincial France the solemnities are sufficiently hideous, but are few and cheap. The friends and townsmen of the departed, in their own dresses, and not masquerading under the auspices of the African Conjuror, surround the hand-bier, and often carry it. It is not considered indispensable to stifle the bearers, or even to elevate the burden on their shoulders; consequently, it is easily taken up, and easily set down, and is carried through the streets without the distressing floundering and shuffling that we see at home. A dirty priest or two, and a dirtier acolyte or two, do not lend any especial grace to the proceedings; and I regard with personal animosity the bassoon, which is blown at intervals by the big-legged priest (it is always a big-legged priest who blows the bassoon), when his fellows combine in a lugubrious stalwart drawl. But there is far less of the Conjuror and the Medicine Man in the business than under like circumstances here. The grim coaches that we reserve expressly for such shows are non-existent; if the cemetery be far out of the town, the coaches that are hired for other purposes of life are hired for this purpose; and, although the honest vehicles make no pretence of being overcome, I have never noticed that the people in them were the worse for it. In Italy, the hooded Members of Confraternities

who attend on funerals are dismal and ugly to look upon; but the services they render are at least voluntarily rendered, and impoverish no one, and cost nothing. Why should high civilisation and low savagery ever come together on the point of making them a wantonly wasteful and contemptible set of forms?

Once I lost a friend by death, who had been troubled in his time by the Medicine Man and the Conjuror, and upon whose limited resources there were abundant claims. The Conjuror assured me that I must positively "follow," and both he and the Medicine Man entertained no doubt that I must go in a black carriage, and must wear "fittings." I objected to fittings, as having nothing to do with my friendship; and I objected to the black carriage, as being in more senses than one a job. So, it came into my mind to try what would happen if I quietly walked, in my own way, from my own house to my friend's burial-place, and stood beside his open grave in my own dress and person, reverently listening to the best of Services. It satisfied my mind, I found, quite as well as if I had been disguised in a hired hat-band and scarf both trailing to my very heels, and as if I had cost the orphan children, in their greatest need, ten guineas.

Can any one who ever beheld the stupendous absurdities attendant on "A message from the Lords" in the House of Commons turn upon the Medicine Man of the poor Indians? Has he any "Medicine," in that dried skin pouch of his, so supremely ludicrous as the two Masters in Chancery holding up their black petticoats, and butting their ridiculous wigs at Mr. Speaker? Yet there are authorities innumerable to tell me—as there are authorities innumerable among the Indians to tell them—that the nonsense is indispensable, and that its abrogation would involve most awful consequences. What would any rational creature who had never heard of judicial and forensic "fittings," think of the Court of Common Pleas on the first day of Term? Or with what an awakened sense of humour would LIVINGSTONE'S account of a similar scene be perused, if the fur and red cloth and goats' hair and horsehair and powdered chalk and black patches on the top of the head, were all at Tala Mungongo instead of Westminster? That model missionary and good brave man found at least one tribe of blacks with a very strong sense of the ridiculous, inasmuch that, although an amiable and docile people, they never could see the missionaries dispose of their legs in the attitude of kneeling, or hear them begin a hymn in chorus, without bursting

into roars of irrepressible laughter. It is much to be hoped that no member of this facetious tribe may ever find his way to England and get committed for contempt of Court.

In the Tonga Islands, already mentioned, there are a set of personages called Mataboos—or some such name—who are the masters of all the public ceremonies, and who know the exact place in which every chief must sit down when a solemn public meeting takes place: a meeting which bears a family resemblance to our own Public Dinner, in respect of its being a main part of the proceedings that every gentleman present is required to drink something nasty. These Mataboos are a privileged order, so important is their avocation, and they make the most of their high functions. A long way out of the Tonga Islands, indeed, rather near the British Islands, was there no calling in of the Mataboos the other day to settle an earth-convolving question of precedence; and was there no weighty opinion delivered on the part of the Mataboos which, being interpreted to that unlucky tribe of blacks with the sense of the ridiculous, would infallibly set the whole population screaming with laughter?

My sense of justice demands the admission, however, that this is not quite a one-sided question. If we submit ourselves meekly to the Medicine Man and the Conjurer, and are not exalted by it, the savages may retort upon us that we act more unwisely than they in other matters wherein we fail to imitate them. It is a widely-diffused custom among savage tribes, when they meet to discuss any affair of public importance, to sit up all night making a horrible noise, dancing, blowing shells, and (in cases where they are familiar with fire-arms) flying out into open places and letting off guns. It is questionable whether our legislative assemblies might not take a hint from this. A shell is not a melodious wind instrument, and it is monotonous; but it is as musical as, and not more monotonous than, my Honourable friend's own trumpet, or the trumpet that he blows so hard for the Minister. The uselessness of arguing with any supporter of a Government or of an Opposition is well known. Try dancing. It is a better exercise, and has the unspeakable recommendation that it couldn't be reported. The honourable and savage member who has a loaded gun, and has grown impatient of debate, plunges out of doors, fires in the air, and returns calm and silent to the Palaver. Let the honourable and civilised member, similarly charged with a speech, dart into the cloisters of Westminster Abbey in the silence of night, let his speech off, and come

back harmless. It is not, at first sight, a very rational custom to paint a broad blue stripe across one's nose and both cheeks, and a broad red stripe from the forehead to the chin, to attach a few pounds of wood to one's under lip, to stick fish bones in one's ears and a brass curtain ring in one's nose, and to rub one's body all over with rancid oil, as a preliminary to entering on business. But this is a question of taste and ceremony, and so is the Windsor Uniform. The manner of entering on the business itself is another question. A council of six hundred savage gentlemen entirely independent of tailors, sitting on their hams in a ring, smoking, and occasionally grunting, seem to me, according to the experience I have gathered in my voyages and travels, somehow to do what they come together for; whereas that is not at all the general experience of a council of six hundred civilised gentlemen very dependent on tailors, and sitting on mechanical contrivances. It is better that an assembly should do its utmost to envelop itself in smoke, than that it should direct its endeavours to enveloping the public in smoke: and I would rather it buried half a hundred hatchets than buried one subject demanding attention.

XXVII.

TITBULL'S ALMSHOUSES.

BY the side of most railways out of London one may see Almshouses and Retreats (generally with a Wing or a Centre wanting, and ambitious of being much bigger than they are), some of which are newly-founded institutions, and some old establishments transplanted. There is a tendency in these pieces of architecture to shoot upward unexpectedly, like Jack's bean-stalk, and to be ornate in spires of Chapels and lanterns of Halls, which might lead to the embellishment of the air with many castles of questionable beauty but for the restraining consideration of expense. However, the managers, being always of a sanguine temperament, comfort themselves with plans and elevations of Loomings in the future, and are influenced in the present by philanthropy towards the railway passengers. For, the question how prosperous and promising the buildings can be made to look in their eyes, usually supercedes the lesser question how they can be turned to the best account for the inmates.

Why none of the people who reside in these places ever look out of window, or take an airing in the piece of ground which is going to be a garden by-and-by, is one of the wonders I have added to my always-lengthening list of the wonders of the world. I have got it into my mind that they live in a state of chronic injury and resentment, and, on that account, refuse to decorate the building with a human interest. As I have known legatees deeply injured by a bequest of five hundred pounds because it was not five thousand, and as I was once acquainted with a pensioner on the Public, to the extent of two hundred a year, who perpetually anathematized his Country because he was not in the receipt of four, having no claim whatever to sixpence; so perhaps it usually happens, within certain limits, that to get a little help is to get a notion of being defrauded of more. "How do they pass their lives in this beautiful and peaceful place?" was the subject of my speculation with a visitor who once accompanied me to a charming rustic retreat for old men and women: a quaint ancient foundation in a pleasant English county, behind a picturesque church, and among rich old convent gardens. There were but some dozen or so of houses, and we agreed that we would talk with the inhabitants, as they sat in their groined rooms between the light of their fires and the light shining in at their latticed windows, and would find out. They passed their lives in considering themselves mulcted of certain ounces of tea by a deaf old steward who lived among them in the quadrangle. There was no reason to suppose that any such ounces of tea had ever been in existence, or that the old steward so much as knew what was the matter;—he passed *his* life in considering himself periodically defrauded of a birch-broom by the beadle.

But it is neither to old Almshouses in the country, nor to new Almshouses by the railroad, that these present uncommercial notes relate. They refer back to journeys made among those commonplace smoky-fronted London Almshouses, with a little paved courtyard in front enclosed by iron railings, which have got snowed up, as it were, by bricks and mortar; which were once in a suburb, but are now in the densely-populated town; gaps in the busy life around them, parentheses in the close and blotted texts of the streets.

Sometimes, these Almshouses belong to a Company or Society. Sometimes, they were established by individuals, and are maintained out of private funds bequeathed in perpetuity long ago. My favourite among them is Titbull's,

which establishment is a picture of many. Of Titbull I know no more than that he deceased in 1723, that his Christian name was Sampson, and his social designation Esquire, and that he founded these Almshouses as Dwellings for Nine Poor Women and Six Poor Men by his Will and Testament: I should not know even this much, but for its being inscribed on a grim stone very difficult to read, let into the front of the centre house of Titbull's Almshouses, and which stone is ornamented atop with a piece of sculptured drapery resembling the effigy of Titbull's bath-towel.

Titbull's Almshouses are in the east of London, in a great highway, in a poor, busy, and thronged neighbourhood. Old iron and fried fish, cough drops and artificial flowers, boiled pigs' feet and household furniture that looks as if it were polished up with lip-salve, umbrellas full of vocal literature and saucers full of shell-fish in a green juice which I hope is natural to them when their health is good, garnish the paved sideways as you go to Titbull's. I take the ground to have risen in those parts since Titbull's time, and you drop into his domain by three stone steps. So did I first drop into it, very nearly striking my brows against Titbull's pump, which stands with its back to the thoroughfare just inside the gate, and has a conceited air of reviewing Titbull's pensioners.

"And a worse one," said a virulent old man with a pitcher, "there isn't nowhere. A harder one to work, nor grudgier one to yield, there isn't nowhere!" This old man wore a long coat, such as we see Hogarth's chairmen represented with, and it was of that peculiar green-pea hue without the green, which seems to come of poverty. It had also that peculiar smell of cupboard which seems to come of poverty.

"The pump is rusty, perhaps," said I.

"Not *it*," said the old man, regarding it with undiluted virulence in his watery eye. "It never were fit to be termed a pump. That's what's the matter with *it*."

"Whose fault is that?" said I.

The old man, who had a working mouth which seemed to be trying to masticate his anger, and to find that it was too hard and there was too much of it, replied, "Them gentlemen."

"What gentlemen?"

"Maybe you're one of 'em?" said the old man suspiciously.

"The trustees?"

"I wouldn't trust 'em myself," said the virulent old man.

"If you mean the gentlemen who administer

this place, no, I am not one of them ; nor have I ever so much as heard of them."

"I wish I never heard of them," gasped the old man: "at my time of life—with the rheumatics—drawing water—from that thing!" Not to be deluded into calling it a Pump, the old man gave it another virulent look, took up his pitcher, and carried it into a corner dwelling-house, shutting the door after him.

Looking around, and seeing that each little house was a house of two little rooms; and seeing that the little oblong courtyard in front was like a graveyard for the inhabitants, saying that no word was engraven on its flat dry stones; and seeing that the currents of life and noise ran to and fro outside, having no more to do with the place than if it were a sort of low-water mark on a lively beach; I say, seeing this and nothing else, I was going out at the gate when one of the doors opened.

"Was you looking for anything, sir?" asked a tiny, well-favoured woman.

Really no; I couldn't say I was.

"Not wanting any one, sir?"

"No—at least, I—pray what is the name of the elderly gentleman who lives in the corner there?"

The tidy woman stepped out to be sure of the door I indicated, and she and the pump and I stood all three in a row, with our backs to the thoroughfare.

"Oh! His name is Mr. Battens," said the tidy woman, dropping her voice.

"I have just been talking with him."

"Indeed?" said the tidy woman. "Ho! I wonder Mr. Battens talked!"

"Is he usually so silent?"

"Well, Mr. Battens is the oldest here—that is to say, the oldest of the old gentlemen—in point of residence."

She had a way of passing her hands over and under one another as she spoke, that was not only tidy, but propitiatory; so I asked her if I might look at her little sitting-room? She willingly replied Yes, and we went into it together: she leaving the door open, with an eye, as I understood, to the social proprieties. The door at once opening into the room without any intervening entry, even scandal must have been silenced by the precaution.

It was a gloomy little chamber, but clean, and with a mug of wallflower in the window. On the chimney-piece were two peacock's feathers, a carved ship, a few shells, and a black profile with one eyelash; whether this portrait purported to be male or female passed my comprehension, until my hostess informed me that

it was her only son, and "quite a speaking one."

"He is alive, I hope?"

"No, sir," said the widow, "he were cast away in China." This was said with a modest sense of its reflecting a certain geographical distinction on his mother.

"If the old gentlemen here are not given to talking," said I, "I hope the old ladies are?—Not that you are one."

She shook her head. "You see, they get so cross."

"How is that?"

"Well, whether the gentlemen really do deprive us of any little matters which ought to be ours by rights, I cannot say for certain; but the opinion of the old ones is they do. And Mr. Battens he do even go so far as to doubt whether credit is due to the Founder. For Mr. Battens he do say, anyhow he got his name up by it, and he done it cheap."

"I am afraid the pump has soured Mr. Battens."

"It may be so," returned the tidy widow, "but the handle does go very hard. Still, what I say to myself is, the gentlemen *may* not pocket the difference between a good pump and a bad one, and I would wish to think well of them. And the dwellings," said my hostess, glancing round her room; "perhaps they were convenient dwellings in the Founder's time, considered *as* his time, and therefore he should not be blamed. But Mrs. Saggars is very hard upon them."

"Mrs. Saggars is the oldest here?"

"The oldest but one. Mrs. Quinch being the oldest, and have totally lost her head."

"And you?"

"I am the youngest in residence, and consequently am not looked up to. But, when Mrs. Quinch makes a happy release, there will be one below me. Nor is it to be expected that Mrs. Saggars will prove herself immortal."

"True. Nor Mr. Battens."

"Regarding the old gentlemen," said my widow slightly, "they count among themselves. They do not count among us. Mr. Battens is that exceptional that he have written to the gentlemen many times, and have worked the case against them. Therefore he have took a higher ground. But we do not, as a rule, greatly reckon the old gentlemen."

Pursuing the subject, I found it to be traditionally settled among the poor ladies that the poor gentlemen, whatever their ages, were all very old indeed, and in a state of dotage. I also discovered that the juniors and new-comers pre

served, for a time, a waning disposition to believe in Titbull and his trustees, but that, as they gained social standing, they lost this faith, and disparaged Titbull and all his works.

Improving my acquaintance subsequently with this respected lady, whose name was Mrs. Mitts, and occasionally dropping in upon her with a little offering of sound Family Hyson in my pocket, I gradually became familiar with the inner politics and ways of Titbull's Almshouses. But I never could find out who the trustees were, or where they were: it being one of the fixed ideas of the place that those authorities must be vaguely and mysteriously mentioned as "the gentlemen" only. The secretary of "the gentlemen" was once pointed out to me, evidently engaged in championing the obnoxious pump against the attacks of the discontented Mr. Battens; but I am not in a condition to report further of him than that he had the sprightly bearing of a lawyer's clerk. I had it from Mrs. Mitts's lips, in a very confidential moment, that Mr. Battens was once "had up before the gentlemen" to stand or fall by his accusations, and that an old shoe was thrown after him on his departure from the building on this dread errand;—not ineffectually, for, the interview resulting in a plumber, was considered to have encircled the temples of Mr. Battens with the wreath of victory.

In Titbull's Almshouses the local society is not regarded as good society. A gentleman or lady receiving visitors from without, or going out to tea, counts, as it were, accordingly; but visitings or tea-drinkings interchanged among Titbullians do not score. Such interchanges, however, are rare, in consequence of internal dissensions occasioned by Mrs. Sagger's pail: which household article has split Titbull's into almost as many parties as there are dwellings in that precinct. The extremely complicated nature of the conflicting articles of belief on the subject prevents my stating them here with my usual perspicuity, but I think they have all branched off from the root-and-trunk question, Has Mrs. Sagger any right to stand her pail outside her dwelling? The question has been much refined upon, but, roughly stated, may be stated in those terms.

There are two old men in Titbull's Almshouses who, I have been given to understand, knew each other in the world beyond its pump and iron railings, when they were both "in trade." They make the best of their reverses, and are looked upon with great contempt. They are little, stooping, blear-eyed old men of cheerful countenance, and they hobble up and

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down the courtyard wagging their chins and talking together quite gaily. This has given offence, and has, moreover, raised the question whether they are justified in passing any other windows than their own. Mr. Battens, however, permitting them to pass *his* windows, on the disdainful ground that their imbecility almost amounts to irresponsibility, they are allowed to take their walk in peace. They live next door to one another, and take it by turns to read the newspaper aloud (that is to say, the newest newspaper they can get), and they play cribbage at night. On warm and sunny days they have been known to go so far as to bring out two chairs, and sit by the iron railings, looking forth, but this low conduct, being much remarked upon throughout Titbull's, they were deterred by an outraged public opinion from repeating it. There is a rumour—but it may be malicious—that they hold the memory of Titbull in some weak sort of veneration, and that they once set off together on a pilgrimage to the parish churchyard to find his tomb. To this, perhaps, might be traced a general suspicion that they are spies of "the gentlemen:" to which they were supposed to have given colour, in my own presence, on the occasion of the weak attempt at justification of the pump by the gentlemen's clerk; when they emerged bare-headed from the doors of their dwellings, as if their dwellings and themselves constituted an old-fashioned weather-glass of double action with two figures of old ladies inside, and deferentially bowed to him at intervals until he took his departure. They are understood to be perfectly friendless and relationless. Unquestionably the two poor fellows make the very best of their lives in Titbull's Almshouses, and unquestionably they are (as before mentioned) the subjects of unmitigated contempt there.

On Saturday nights, when there is a greater stir than usual outside, and when itinerant vendors of miscellaneous wares even take their stations and light up their smoky lamps before the iron railings, Titbull's becomes flurried. Mrs. Sagger has her celebrated palpitations of the heart, for the most part, on Saturday nights. But Titbull's is unfit to strive with the uproar of the streets in any of its phases. It is religiously believed at Titbull's that people push more than they used, and likewise that the foremost object of the population of England and Wales is to get you down and trample on you. Even of railroads they know, at Titbull's, little more than the shriek (which Mrs. Sagger says goes through her, and ought to be taken up by Government); and the penny postage may even yet be un-

known there, for I have never seen a letter delivered to any inhabitant. But there is a tall, straight, sallow lady resident in Number Seven, Titbull's, who never speaks to anybody, who is surrounded by a superstitious halo of lost wealth, who does her household work in housemaid's gloves, and who is secretly much deferred to, though openly cavilled at; and it has obscurely leaked out that this old lady has a son, grandson, nephew, or other relative, who is "a Contractor," and who would think it nothing of a job to knock down Titbull's, pack it off into Cornwall, and knock it together again. An immense sensation was made by a gipsy party calling, in a spring van, to take this old lady up to go for a day's pleasure into Epping Forest, and notes were compared as to which of the company was the son, grandson, nephew, or other relative, the Contractor. A thick-set personage, with a white hat and a cigar in his mouth, was the favourite: though, as Titbull's had no other reason to believe that the Contractor was there at all than that this man was supposed to eye the chimney-stacks as if he would like to knock them down and cart them off, the general mind was much unsettled in arriving at a conclusion. As a way out of this difficulty, it concentrated itself on the acknowledged Beauty of the party, every stitch in whose dress was verbally unripped by the old ladies then and there, and whose "goings-on" with another and a thinner personage in a white hat might have sufficed the pump (where they were principally discussed) with blushes for months afterwards. Herein Titbull's was to Titbull's true, for it has a constitutional dislike of all strangers. As concerning innovations and improvements, it is always of opinion that what it doesn't want itself, nobody ought to want. But I think I have met with this opinion outside Titbull's.

Of the humble treasures of furniture brought into Titbull's by the inmates when they establish themselves in that place of contemplation for the rest of their days, by far the greater and more valuable part belongs to the ladies. I may claim the honour of having either crossed the threshold, or looked in at the door, of every one of the nine ladies, and I have noticed that they are all particular in the article of bedsteads, and maintain favourite and long-established bedsteads and bedding as a regular part of their rest. Generally an antiquated chest of drawers is among their cherished possessions; a tea-tray always is. I know of at least two rooms in which a little tea-kettle of genuine burnished copper vies with the cat in winking at the fire; and one old lady has a tea-urn set forth in state

on the top of her chest of drawers, which urn is used as her library, and contains four duodecimo volumes, and a black-bordered newspaper giving an account of the funeral of her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte. Among the poor old gentlemen there are no such niceties. Their furniture has the air of being contributed, like some obsolete Literary Miscellany, "by several hands;" their few chairs never match; old patchwork coverlets linger among them; and they have an untidy habit of keeping their wardrobes in hat-boxes. When I recall one old gentleman who is rather choice in his shoe-brushes and blacking bottle, I have summed up the domestic elegancies of that side of the building.

On the occurrence of a death in Titbull's, it is invariably agreed among the survivors—and it is the only subject on which they do agree—that the departed did something "to bring it on." Judging by Titbull's, I should say the human race need never die, if they took care. But they don't take care, and they do die, and when they die in Titbull's they are buried at the cost of the Foundation. Some provision has been made for the purpose, in virtue of which (I record this on the strength of having seen the funeral of Mrs. Quinch) a lively neighbouring undertaker dresses up four of the old men, and four of the old women, hustles them into a procession of four couples, and leads off with a large black bow at the back of his hat, looking over his shoulder at them airily, from time to time, to see that no member of the party has got lost, or has tumbled down; as if they were a company of dim old dolls.

Resignation of a dwelling is of very rare occurrence in Titbull's. A story does obtain there, how an old lady's son once drew a prize of Thirty Thousand Pounds in the Lottery, and presently drove to the gate in his own carriage, with French Horns playing up behind, and whisked his mother away, and left ten guineas for a Feast. But I have been unable to substantiate it by any evidence, and regard it as an Almshouse Fairy Tale. It is curious that the only proved case of resignation happened within my knowledge.

It happened on this wise. There is a sharp competition among the ladies respecting the gentility of their visitors, and I have so often observed visitors to be dressed as for a holiday occasion, that I suppose the ladies to have besought them to make all possible display when they come. In these circumstances much excitement was one day occasioned by Mrs. Mitts receiving a visit from a Greenwich Pensioner.

He was a Pensioner of a bluff and warlike appearance, with an empty coat-sleeve, and he was got up with unusual care; his coat buttons were extremely bright, he wore his empty coat-sleeve in a graceful festoon, and he had a walking-stick in his hand that must have cost money. When, with the head of his walking-stick, he knocked at Mrs. Mitts's door—there are no knockers in Titbull's—Mrs. Mitts was overheard by a next-door neighbour to utter a cry of surprise expressing much agitation; and the same neighbour did afterwards solemnly affirm that, when he was admitted into Mrs. Mitts's room, she heard a smack. Heard a smack which was not a blow.

There was an air about this Greenwich Pensioner, when he took his departure, which imbued all Titbull's with the conviction that he was coming again. He was eagerly looked for, and Mrs. Mitts was closely watched. In the meantime, if anything could have placed the unfortunate six old gentlemen at a greater disadvantage than that at which they chronically stood, it would have been the apparition of this Greenwich Pensioner. They were well shrunken already, but they shrank to nothing in comparison with the Pensioner. Even the poor old gentlemen themselves seemed conscious of their inferiority, and to know submissively that they could never hope to hold their own against the Pensioner, with his warlike and maritime experience in the past, and his tobacco money in the present: his chequered career of blue water, black gunpowder, and red bloodshed for England, home, and beauty.

Before three weeks were out, the Pensioner reappeared. Again he knocked at Mrs. Mitts's door with the handle of his stick, and again was he admitted. But not again did he depart alone; for Mrs. Mitts, in a bonnet identified as having been re-embellished, went out walking with him, and stayed out till the ten-o'clock beer, Greenwich time.

There was now a truce even as to the troubled waters of Mrs. Sagger's pail; nothing was spoken of among the ladies but the conduct of Mrs. Mitts, and its blighting influence on the reputation of Titbull's. It was agreed that Mr. Battens "ought to take it up," and Mr. Battens was communicated with on the subject. That unsatisfactory individual replied "that he didn't see his way yet," and it was unanimously voted by the ladies that aggravation was in his nature.

How it came to pass, with some appearance of inconsistency, that Mrs. Mitts was cut by all the ladies and the Pensioner admired by all the

ladies, matters not. Before another week was out, Titbull's was startled by another phenomenon. At ten o'clock in the forenoon appeared a cab, containing not only the Greenwich Pensioner with one arm, but, to boot, a Chelsea Pensioner with one leg. Both dismounting to assist Mrs. Mitts into the cab, the Greenwich Pensioner bore her company inside, and the Chelsea Pensioner mounted the box by the driver: his wooden leg sticking out after the manner of a bowsprit, as if in jocular homage to his friend's sea-going career. Thus the equipage drove away. No Mrs. Mitts returned that night.

What Mr. Battens might have done in the matter of taking it up, goaded by the infuriated state of public feeling next morning, was anticipated by another phenomenon. A Truck, propelled by the Greenwich Pensioner and the Chelsea Pensioner, each placidly smoking a pipe, and pushing his warrior breast against the handle.

The display on the part of the Greenwich Pensioner of his "marriage lines," and his announcement that himself and friend had looked in for the furniture of Mrs. G. Pensioner, late Mitts, by no means reconciled the ladies to the conduct of their sister; on the contrary, it is said that they appeared more than ever exasperated. Nevertheless, my stray visits to Titbull's, since the date of this occurrence, have confirmed me in an impression that it was a wholesome filip. The nine ladies are smarter, both in mind and dress, than they used to be, though it must be admitted that they despise the six gentlemen to the last extent. They have a much greater interest in the external thoroughfare, too, than they had when I first knew Titbull's. And whenever I chance to be leaning my back against the pump or the iron railings, and to be talking to one of the junior ladies, and to see that a flush has passed over her face, I immediately know, without looking round, that a Greenwich Pensioner has gone past.

XXVIII.

THE ITALIAN PRISONER.

THE rising of the Italian people from under their unutterable wrongs, and the tardy burst of day upon them after the long long night of oppression that has darkened their beautiful country, have naturally caused my mind to dwell often, of late, on my own small wanderings in Italy. Connected with them is

a curious little drama, in which the character I myself sustained was so very subordinate that I may relate its story without any fear of being suspected of self-display. It is strictly a true story.

I am newly arrived, one summer evening, in a certain small town on the Mediterranean. I have had my dinner at the inn, and I and the mosquitoes are coming out into the streets together. It is far from Naples; but a bright

brown plump little woman-servant at the inn is a Neapolitan, and is so vivaciously expert in pantomimic action, that, in the single moment of answering my request to have a pair of shoes cleaned which I have left up-stairs, she plies imaginary brushes, and goes completely through the motions of polishing the shoes up, and laying them at my feet. I smile at the brisk little woman in perfect satisfaction with her briskness; and the brisk little woman, amiably pleased



"IT WAS AGREED THAT MR. BATTENS 'OUGHT TO TAKE IT UP,' AND MR. BATTENS WAS COMMUNICATED WITH ON THE SUBJECT."

with me because I am pleased with her, claps her hands and laughs delightfully. We are in the inn yard. As the little woman's bright eyes sparkle on the cigarette I am smoking, I make bold to offer her one; she accepts it none the less merrily, because I touch a most charming little dimple in her fat cheek with its light paper end. Glancing up at the many green lattices to assure herself that the mistress is not looking on, the little woman then puts her two little dimple arms a-kimbo, and stands on tiptoe to light her

cigarette at mine. "And now, dear little sir," says she, puffing out smoke in a most innocent and cherubic manner, "keep quite straight on, take the first to the right, and probably you will see him standing at his door."

I have a commission to "him," and I have been inquiring about him. I have carried the commission about Italy several months. Before I left England, there came to me one night a certain generous and gentle English nobleman (he is dead in these days when I relate the story, and

exiles have lost their best British friend), with this request: "Whenever you come to such a town, will you seek out one Giovanni Carlavero, who keeps a little wine-shop there, mention my name to him suddenly, and observe how it affects him?" I accepted the trust, and am on my way to discharge it.

The sirocco has been blowing all day, and it is a hot unwholesome evening, with no cool sea breeze. Mosquitoes and fire-flies are lively enough, but most other creatures are faint. The coquettish airs of pretty young women in the tiniest and wickedest of dolls' straw hats, who lean out at opened lattice blinds, are almost the only airs stirring. Very ugly and haggard old women with distaffs, and with a grey tow upon them that looks as if they were spinning out their own hair (I suppose they were once pretty, too, but it is very difficult to believe so), sit on the footway leaning against house walls. Everybody who has come for water to the fountain stays there, and seems incapable of any such energetic idea as going home. Vespers are over, though not so long but that I can smell the heavy resinous incense as I pass the church. No man seems to be at work save the copper-smith. In an Italian town he is always at work, and always thumping in the deadliest manner.

I keep straight on, and come in due time to the first on the right; a narrow dull street, where I see a well-favoured man of good stature and military bearing, in a great cloak, standing at a door. Drawing nearer to this threshold, I see it is the threshold of a small wine-shop; and I can just make out, in the dim light, the inscription that it is kept by Giovanni Carlavero.

I touch my hat to the figure in the cloak, and pass in, and draw a stool to a little table. The lamp (just such another as they dig out of Pompeii) is lighted, but the place is empty. The figure in the cloak has followed me in, and stands before me.

"The master?"

"At your service, sir."

"Please to give me a glass of the wine of the country."

He turns to a little counter to get it. As his striking face is pale, and his action is evidently that of an enfeebled man, I remark that I fear he has been ill. It is not much, he courteously and gravely answers, though bad while it lasts: the fever.

As he sets the wine on the little table, to his manifest surprise I lay my hand on the back of his, look him in the face, and say in a low voice: "I am an Englishman, and you are acquainted with a friend of mine. Do you recollect—?"

and I mentioned the name of my generous countryman.

Instantly he utters a loud cry, bursts into tears, and falls on his knees at my feet, clasping my legs in both his arms, and bowing his head to the ground.

Some years ago, this man at my feet, whose overfraught heart is heaving as if it would burst from his breast, and whose tears are wet upon the dress I wear, was a galley-slave in the North of Italy. He was a political offender, having been concerned in the then last rising, and was sentenced to imprisonment for life. That he would have died in his chains is certain, but for the circumstance that the Englishman happened to visit his prison.

It was one of the vile old prisons of Italy, and a part of it was below the waters of the harbour. The place of his confinement was an arched underground and under-water gallery, with a grill-gate at the entrance, through which it received such light and air as it got. Its condition was insufferably foul, and a stranger could hardly breathe in it, or see in it with the aid of a torch. At the upper end of this dungeon, and consequently in the worst position, as being the furthest removed from light and air, the Englishman first beheld him, sitting on an iron bedstead, to which he was chained by a heavy chain. His countenance impressed the Englishman as having nothing in common with the faces of the malefactors with whom he was associated, and he talked with him, and learnt how he came to be there.

When the Englishman emerged from the dreadful den into the light of day, he asked his conductor, the governor of the gaol, why Giovanni Carlavero was put into the worst place?

"Because he is particularly recommended," was the stringent answer.

"Recommended, that is to say, for death?"

"Excuse me; particularly recommended," was again the answer.

"He has a bad tumour in his neck, no doubt occasioned by the hardship of his miserable life. If he continues to be neglected, and he remains where he is, it will kill him."

"Excuse me, I can do nothing. He is particularly recommended."

The Englishman was staying in that town, and he went to his home there; but the figure of this man chained to the bedstead made it no home, and destroyed his rest and peace. He was an Englishman of an extraordinarily tender heart, and he could not bear the picture. He went back to the prison grate; went back again and again, and talked to the man and cheered him.

He used his utmost influence to get the man unchained from the bedstead, were it only for ever so short a time in the day, and permitted to come to the grate. It took a long time, but the Englishman's station, personal character, and steadiness of purpose wore out opposition so far, and that grace was at last accorded. Through the bars, when he could thus get light upon the tumour, the Englishman lanced it, and it did well, and healed. His strong interest in the prisoner had greatly increased by this time, and he formed the desperate resolution that he would exert his utmost self-devotion, and use his utmost efforts, to get Carlavero pardoned.

If the prisoner had been a brigand and a murderer, if he had committed every non-political crime in the Newgate Calendar and out of it, nothing would have been easier than for a man of any court or priestly influence to obtain his release. As it was, nothing could have been more difficult. Italian authorities, and English authorities who had interest with them, alike assured the Englishman that his object was hopeless. He met with nothing but evasion, refusal, and ridicule. His political prisoner became a joke in the place. It was especially observable that English Circumlocution, and English Society on its travels, were as humorous on the subject as Circumlocution and Society may be on any subject without loss of caste. But, the Englishman possessed (and proved it well in his life) a courage very uncommon among us: he had not the least fear of being considered a bore in a good humane cause. So he went on persistently trying, and trying, and trying to get Giovanni Carlavero out. That prisoner had been rigorously re-chained after the tumour operation, and it was not likely that his miserable life could last very long.

One day, when all the town knew about the Englishman and his political prisoner, there came to the Englishman a certain sprightly Italian Advocate of whom he had some knowledge; and he made this strange proposal. "Give me a hundred pounds to obtain Carlavero's release. I think I can get him a pardon with that money. But I cannot tell you what I am going to do with the money, nor must you ever ask me the question if I succeed, nor must you ever ask me for an account of the money if I fail." The Englishman decided to hazard the hundred pounds. He did so, and heard not another word of the matter. For half a year and more the Advocate made no sign, and never once "took on" in any way to have the subject on his mind. The Englishman was then obliged to change his residence to another and more

famous town in the North of Italy. He parted from the poor prisoner with a sorrowful heart, as from a doomed man for whom there was no release but Death.

The Englishman lived in his new place of abode another half-year and more, and had no tidings of the wretched prisoner. At length, one day, he received from the Advocate a cool, concise, mysterious note to this effect. "If you still wish to bestow that benefit upon the man in whom you were once interested, send me fifty pounds more, and I think it can be insured." Now, the Englishman had long settled in his mind that the Advocate was a heartless sharper, who had played upon his credulity and his interest in an unfortunate sufferer. So, he sat down and wrote a dry answer, giving the Advocate to understand that he was wiser now than he had been formerly, and that no more money was extractable from his pocket.

He lived outside the city gates, some mile or two from the post-office, and was accustomed to walk into the city with his letters, and post them himself. On a lovely spring day, when the sky was exquisitely blue, and the sea divinely beautiful, he took his usual walk, carrying this letter to the Advocate in his pocket. As he went along, his gentle heart was much moved by the loveliness of the prospect, and by the thought of the slowly-dying prisoner chained to the bedstead, for whom the universe had no delights. As he drew nearer and nearer to the city where he was to post the letter, he became very uneasy in his mind. He debated with himself, was it remotely possible, after all, that this sum of fifty pounds could restore the fellow-creature whom he pitied so much, and for whom he had striven so hard, to liberty? He was not a conventionally rich Englishman—very far from that—but, he had a spare fifty pounds at the banker's. He resolved to risk it. Without doubt, God has recompensed him for the resolution.

He went to the banker's, and got a bill for the amount, and enclosed it in a letter to the Advocate that I wish I could have seen. He simply told the Advocate that he was quite a poor man, and that he was sensible it might be a great weakness in him to part with so much money on the faith of so vague a communication; but, that there it was, and that he prayed the Advocate to make good use of it. If he did otherwise, no good could ever come of it, and it would lie heavy on his soul one day.

Within a week, the Englishman was sitting at his breakfast, when he heard some suppressed sounds of agitation on the staircase, and Gio-

vanni Carlavero leaped into the room and fell upon his breast, a free man !

Conscious of having wronged the Advocate in his own thoughts, the Englishman wrote him an earnest and grateful letter, avowing the fact, and entreating him to confide by what means and through what agency he had succeeded so well. The Advocate returned for answer through the post, "There are many things, as you know, in this Italy of ours, that are safest and best not

even spoken of—far less written of. We may meet some day, and then I may tell you what you want to know ; not here, and now." But, the two never did meet again. The Advocate was dead when the Englishman gave me my trust ; and how the man had been set free remained as great a mystery to the Englishman, and to the man himself, as it was to me.

But, I knew this :—Here was the man, this sultry night, on his knees at my feet, because I



"AT THE UPPER END OF THIS DUNGEON . . . THE ENGLISHMAN FIRST BEHELD HIM, SITTING ON AN IRON BEDSTEAD, TO WHICH HE WAS CHAINED BY A HEAVY CHAIN."

was the Englishman's friend ; here were his tears upon my dress ; here were his sobs choking his utterance ; here were his kisses on my hands, because they had touched the hands that had worked out his release. He had no need to tell me it would be happiness to him to die for his benefactor ; I doubt if I ever saw real, sterling, fervent gratitude of soul before or since.

He was much watched and suspected, he said, and had had enough to do to keep himself out of trouble. This, and his not having prospered

in his worldly affairs, had led to his having failed in his usual communications to the Englishman for—as I now remember the period—some two or three years, but his prospects were brighter, and his wife, who had been very ill, had recovered, and his fever had left him, and he had bought a little vineyard, and would I carry to his benefactor the first of its wine ? Ay, that I would (I told him with enthusiasm), and not a drop of it should be spilled or lost !

He had cautiously closed the door before

speaking of himself, and had talked with such excess of emotion, and in a provincial Italian so difficult to understand, that I had more than once been obliged to stop him, and beg him to have compassion on me, and be slower and calmer. By degrees he became so, and tranquilly walked back with me to the hotel. There, I sat down before I went to bed, and wrote a faithful account of him to the Englishman : which I concluded by saying that I would bring the wine home, against any difficulties, every drop.

Early next morning, when I came out at the hotel door to pursue my journey, I found my friend waiting with one of those immense bottles in which the Italian peasants store their wine—a bottle holding some half-dozen gallons—bound round with basket-work for greater safety on the journey. I see him now, in the bright sun-light, tears of gratitude in his eyes, proudly inviting my attention to this corpulent bottle. (At the street corner hard by, two high-flavoured, able-bodied monks—pretending to talk together, but keeping their four evil eyes upon us.)

How the bottle had been got there did not appear; but the difficulty of getting it into the ramshackle vetturino carriage in which I was departing was so great, and it took up so much room when it was got in, that I elected to sit outside. The last I saw of Giovanni Carlavero was his running through the town by the side of the jingling wheels, clapping my hand as I stretched it down from the box, charging me with a thousand last loving and dutiful messages to his dear patron, and finally looking in at the bottle, as it reposed inside, with an admiration of its honourable way of travelling that was beyond measure delightful.

And now, what disquiet of mind this dearly-beloved and highly-treasured Bottle began to cost me, no man knows. It was my precious charge through a long tour, and, for hundreds of miles, I never had it off my mind by day or by night. Over bad roads—and they were many—I clung to it with affectionate desperation. Up mountains, I looked in at it, and saw it helplessly tilting over on its back, with terror. At innumerable inn doors, when the weather was bad, I was obliged to be put into my vehicle before the Bottle could be got in, and was obliged to have the Bottle lifted out before human aid could come near me. The Imp of the same name, except that his associations were all evil and these associations were all good, would have been a less troublesome travelling companion. I might have served Mr. Cruikshank as a subject for a new illustration of

the miseries of the Bottle. The National Temperance Society might have made a powerful Tract of me.

The suspicions that attached to this innocent Bottle greatly aggravated my difficulties. It was like the apple-pie in the child's book. Parma pouted at it, Modena mocked it, Tuscany tackled it, Naples nibbled it, Rome refused it, Austria accused it, Soldiers suspected it, Jesuits jobbed it. I composed a neat Oration, developing my inoffensive intentions in connection with this Bottle, and delivered it in an infinity of guard-houses, at a multitude of town gates, and on every drawbridge, angle, and rampart of a complete system of fortifications. Fifty times a day I got down to harangue an infuriated soldiery about the Bottle. Through the filthy degradation of the abject and vile Roman States, I had as much difficulty in working my way with the Bottle as if it had bottled up a complete system of heretical theology. In the Neapolitan country, where everybody was a spy, a soldier, a priest, or a lazzarone, the shameless beggars of all four denominations incessantly pounced on the Bottle, and made it a pretext for extorting money from me. Quires—quires—do I say? Reams—of forms illegibly printed on whity-brown paper were filled up about the Bottle, and it was the subject of more stamping and sanding than I had ever seen before. In consequence of which haze of sand, perhaps, it was always irregular, and always latent with dismal penalties of going back or not going forward, which were only to be abated by the silver crossing of a base hand, poked shirtless out of a ragged uniform sleeve. Under all discouragements, however, I stuck to my Bottle, and held firm to my resolution that every drop of its contents should reach the Bottle's destination.

The latter refinement cost me a separate heap of troubles on its own separate account. What cork-screws did I see the military power bring out against that Bottle; what gimlets, spikes, divining rods, gauges, and unknown tests and instruments! At some places they persisted in declaring that the wine must not be passed without being opened and tasted; I pleading to the contrary, used then to argue the question seated on the Bottle, lest they should open it in spite of me. In the southern parts of Italy more violent shrieking, face-making, and gesticulating, greater vehemence of speech and countenance and action, went on about that Bottle, than would attend fifty murders in a northern latitude. It raised important functionaries out of their beds in the dead of night,

I have known half-a-dozen military lanterns to disperse themselves at all points of a great sleeping Piazza, each lantern summoning some official creature to get up, put on his cocked-hat instantly, and come and stop the Bottle. It was characteristic that while this innocent Bottle had such immense difficulty in getting from little town to town, Signor Mazzini and the fiery cross were traversing Italy from end to end.

Still, I stuck to my Bottle, like any fine old English gentleman all of the olden time. The more the Bottle was interfered with, the stauncher I became (if possible) in my first determination that my countryman should have it delivered to him intact, as the man whom he had so nobly restored to life and liberty had delivered it to me. If ever I had been obstinate in my days—and I may have been, say, once or twice—I was obstinate about the Bottle. But, I made it a rule always to keep a pocket-full of small coin at its service, and never to be out of temper in its cause. Thus I and the Bottle made our way. Once we had a break-down; rather a bad break-down, on a steep high place with the sea below us, on a tempestuous evening when it blew great guns. We were driving four wild horses abreast, Southern fashion, and there was some little difficulty in stopping them. I was outside, and not thrown off; but no words can describe my feelings when I saw the Bottle—travelling inside, as usual—burst the door open, and roll obesely out into the road. A blessed Bottle with a charmed existence, he took no hurt, and we repaired damage, and went on triumphant.

A thousand representations were made to me that the Bottle must be left at this place, or that, and called for again. I never yielded to one of them, and never parted from the Bottle, on any pretence, consideration, threat, or entreaty. I had no faith in any official receipt for the Bottle, and nothing would induce me to accept one. These unmanageable politics at last brought me and the Bottle, still triumphant, to Genoa. There I took a tender and reluctant leave of him for a few weeks, and consigned him to a trusty English captain, to be conveyed to the Port of London by sea.

While the Bottle was on his voyage to England, I read the Shipping Intelligence as anxiously as if I had been an underwriter. There was some stormy weather after I myself had got to England by way of Switzerland and France, and my mind greatly misgave me that the Bottle might be wrecked. At last, to my great joy, I received notice of his safe arrival, and immediately went down to St. Katherine's

Docks, and found him in a state of honourable captivity in the Custom House.

The wine was mere vinegar when I set it down before the generous Englishman—probably it had been something like vinegar when I took it up*from Giovanni Carlavero—but not a drop of it was spilled or gone. And the Englishman told me, with much emotion in his face and voice, that he had never tasted wine that seemed to him so sweet and sound. And long afterwards, the Bottle graced his table. And the last time I saw him in this world that misses him, he took me aside in a crowd to say, with his amiable smile: "We were talking of you only to-day at dinner, and I wished you had been there, for I had some Claret up in Carlavero's Bottle."

XXIX.

THE SHORT-TIMERS.

WITHIN so many yards of this Covent-Garden lodging of mine, as within so many yards of Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Houses of Parliament, the Prisons, the Courts of Justice, all the Institutions that govern the land, I can find—*must* find, whether I will or no—in the open streets, shameful instances of neglect of children, intolerable toleration of the engenderment of paupers, idlers, thieves, traces of wretched and destructive cripples both in body and mind, a misery to themselves, a misery to the community, a disgrace to civilisation, and an outrage on Christianity. I know it to be a fact as easy of demonstration as any sum in any of the elementary rules of arithmetic, that if the State would begin its work and duty at the beginning, and would with the strong hand take those children out of the streets while they are yet children, and wisely train them, it would make them a part of England's glory, not its shame—of England's strength, not its weakness—would raise good soldiers and sailors, and good citizens, and many great men out of the seeds of its criminal population. Yet I go on bearing with the enormity as if it were nothing, and I go on reading the Parliamentary Debates as if they were something, and I concern myself far more about one railway bridge across a public thoroughfare than about a dozen generations of scrofula, ignorance, wickedness, prostitution, poverty, and felony. I can slip out at

my door in the small hours after any midnight, and, in one circuit of the purlieus of Covent-Garden Market, can behold a state of infancy and youth as vile as if a Bourbon sat upon the English throne; a great police force looking on with authority to do no more than worry and hunt the dreadful vermin into corners, and there leave them. Within the length of a few streets I can find a workhouse, mismanaged with that dull short-sighted obstinacy that its greatest opportunities as to the children it receives are lost, and yet not a farthing saved to any one. But the wheel goes round, and round, and round; and because it goes round—so I am told by the politest authorities—it goes well."

Thus I reflected, one day in the Whitsun week last past, as I floated down the Thames among the bridges, looking—not inappropriately—at the drags that were hanging up at certain dirty stairs to hook the drowned out, and at the numerous conveniences provided to facilitate their tumbling in. My object in that uncommercial journey called up another train of thought, and it ran as follows:

"When I was at school, one of seventy boys, I wonder by what secret understanding our attention began to wander when we had pored over our books for some hours. I wonder by what ingenuity we brought on that confused state of mind when sense became nonsense, when figures wouldn't work, when dead languages wouldn't construe, when live languages wouldn't be spoken, when memory wouldn't come, when dulness and vacancy wouldn't go. I cannot remember that we ever conspired to be sleepy after dinner, or that we ever particularly wanted to be stupid, and to have flushed faces and hot beating heads, or to find blank hopelessness and obscurity this afternoon in what would become perfectly clear and bright in the freshness of to-morrow morning. We suffered for these things, and they made us miserable enough. Neither do I remember that we ever bound ourselves, by any secret oath or other solemn obligation, to find the seats getting too hard to be sat upon after a certain time; or to have intolerable twitches in our legs, rendering us aggressive and malicious with those members; or to be troubled with a similar uneasiness in our elbows, attended with fistic consequences to our neighbours; or to carry two pounds of lead in the chest, four pounds in the head, and several active blue-bottles in each ear. Yet, for certain, we suffered under those distresses, and were always charged at for labouring under them, as if we had brought them on of our own deliberate act and deed. As to the mental

portion of them being my own fault in my own case—I should like to ask any well-trained and experienced teacher, not to say psychologist. And as to the physical portion—I should like to ask PROFESSOR OWEN."

It happened that I had a small bundle of papers with me, on what is called "The Half-Time System" in schools. Referring to one of those papers, I found that the indefatigable Mr. CHADWICK had been beforehand with me, and had already asked Professor Owen: who had handsomely replied that I was not to blame, but that, being troubled with a skeleton, and having been constituted according to certain natural laws, I and my skeleton were unfortunately bound by those laws—even in school—and had comported ourselves accordingly. Much comforted by the good Professor's being on my side, I read on to discover whether the indefatigable Mr. Chadwick had taken up the mental part of my afflictions. I found that he had, and that he had gained on my behalf SIR BENJAMIN BRODIE, SIR DAVID WILKIE, SIR WALTER SCOTT, and the common sense of mankind. For which I beg Mr. Chadwick, if this should meet his eye, to accept my warm acknowledgments.

Up to that time I had retained a misgiving that the seventy unfortunates, of whom I was one, must have been, without knowing it, leagued together by the spirit of evil in a sort of perpetual Guy Fawkes Plot, to grope about in vaults with dark lanterns after a certain period of continuous study. But now the misgiving vanished, and I floated on with a quieted mind to see the Half-Time System in action. For that was the purpose of my journey, both by steam-boat on the Thames, and by very dirty railway on the shore. To which last institution I beg to recommend the legal use of coke as engine fuel, rather than the illegal use of coal; the recommendation is quite disinterested, for I was most liberally supplied with small coal on the journey, for which no charge was made. I had not only my eyes, nose, and ears filled, but my hat, and all my pockets, and my pocket-book, and my watch.

The V.D.S.C.R.C. (or Very Dirty and Small Coal Railway Company) delivered me close to my destination, and I soon found the Half-Time System established in spacious premises, and freely placed at my convenience and disposal.

What would I see first of the Half-Time System? I chose Military Drill. "Attention!" Instantly a hundred boys stood forth in the paved yard as one boy; bright, quick, eager, steady, watchful for the look of com-

mand, instant and ready for the word. Not only was there complete precision—complete accord to the eye and to the ear—but an alertness in the doing of the thing which deprived it, curiously, of its monotonous or mechanical character. There was perfect uniformity, and yet an individual spirit and emulation. No spectator could doubt that the boys liked it. With non-commissioned officers varying from a yard to a yard and a half high, the result could not possibly have been attained otherwise. They marched, and counter-marched, and formed in line and square, and company, and single file and double file, and performed a variety of evolutions; all most admirably. In respect of an air of enjoyable understanding of what they were about, which seems to be forbidden to English soldiers, the boys might have been small French troops. When they were dismissed, and the broadsword exercise, limited to a much smaller number, succeeded, the boys who had no part in that new drill either looked on attentively, or disported themselves in a gymnasium hard by. The steadiness of the broadsword boys on their short legs, and the firmness with which they sustained the different positions, was truly remarkable.

The broadsword exercise over, suddenly there was great excitement and a rush. Naval Drill!

In a corner of the ground stood a decked mimic ship, with real masts, yards, and sails—mainmast seventy feet high. At the word of command from the Skipper of this ship—a mahogany-faced Old Salt, with the indispensable quid in his cheek, the true nautical roll, and all wonderfully complete—the rigging was covered with a swarm of boys: one, the first to spring into the shrouds, outstripping all the others, and resting on the truck of the main-topmast in no time.

And now we stood out to sea in a most amazing manner: the Skipper himself, the whole crew, the Uncommercial, and all hands present, implicitly believing that there was not a moment to lose, that the wind had that instant chopped round and sprung up fair, and that we were away on a voyage round the world. Get all sail upon her! With a will, my lads! Lay out upon the main-yard there! Look alive at the weather earring! Cheery, my boys! Let go the sheet now! Stand by at the braces, you! With a will, aloft there! Belay, starboard watch! Fifer! Come aft, fifer, and give 'em a tune! Forthwith springs up fifer, fife in hand—smallest boy ever seen—big lump on temple, having lately fallen down on a paving-

stone—gives 'em a tune with all his might and main. Hooroar, fifer! With a will, my lads! Tip 'em a livelier one, fifer! Fifer tips 'em a livelier one, and excitement increases. Shake 'em out, my lads! Well done! There you have her! Pretty, pretty! Every rag upon her she can carry, wind right astarn, and ship cutting through the water fifteen knots an hour!

At this favourable moment of her voyage I gave the alarm, "A man overboard!" (on the gravel), but he was immediately recovered, none the worse. Presently, I observed the Skipper overboard, but forebore to mention it, as he seemed in nowise disconcerted by the accident. Indeed, I soon came to regard the Skipper as an amphibious creature, for he was so perpetually plunging overboard to look up at the hands aloft, that he was oftener in the bosom of the ocean than on deck. His pride in his crew on those occasions was delightful, and the conventional unintelligibility of his orders in the ears of uncommercial landlubbers and loblolly boys, though they were always intelligible to the crew, was hardly less pleasant. But we couldn't expect to go on in this way for ever; dirty weather came on, and then worse weather, and when we least expected it we got into tremendous difficulties. Screw loose in the chart, perhaps—something certainly wrong somewhere—but here we were with breakers ahead, my lads, driving head on, slap on a lee shore! The Skipper broached this terrific announcement in such great agitation, that the small fifer, not fiffing now, but standing looking on near the wheel with his fife under his arm, seemed for the moment quite unboyed, though he speedily recovered his presence of mind. In the trying circumstances that ensued, the Skipper and the crew proved worthy of one another. The Skipper got dreadfully hoarse, but otherwise was master of the situation. The man at the wheel did wonders; all hands (except the fifer) were turned up to wear ship; and I observed the fifer, when we were at our greatest extremity, to refer to some document in his waistcoat pocket, which I conceived to be his will. I think she struck. I was not myself conscious of any collision, but I saw the Skipper so very often washed overboard and back again, that I could only impute it to the beating of the ship. I am not enough of a seaman to describe the manoeuvres by which we were saved, but they made the Skipper very hot (French polishing his mahogany face) and the crew very nimble, and succeeded to a marvel; for, within a few minutes of the first alarm, we had wore ship and got her off, and were all a-tauto—which I felt very

grateful for: not that I knew what it was, but that I perceived that we had not been all a-tauto lately. Land now appeared on our weather-bow, and we shaped our course for it, having the wind abeam, and frequently changing the man at the helm, in order that every man might have his spell. We worked into harbour under prosperous circumstances, and furled our sails, and squared our yards, and made all ship-shape and handsome, and so our voyage ended. When I complimented the Skipper, at parting, on his exertions and those of his gallant crew, he informed me that the latter were provided for the worst, all hands being taught to swim and dive; and he added that the able seaman at the main-topmast truck, especially, could dive as deep as he could go high.

The next adventure that befell me, in my visit to the Short-Timers, was the sudden apparition of a military band. I had been inspecting the hammocks of the crew of the good ship, when I saw with astonishment that several musical instruments, brazen and of great size, appeared to have suddenly developed two legs each, and to be trotting about a yard. And my astonishment was heightened when I observed a large drum, that had previously been leaning helpless against a wall, taking up a stout position on four legs. Approaching this drum and looking over it, I found two boys behind it (it was too much for one), and then I found that each of the brazen instruments had brought out a boy, and was going to discourse sweet sounds. The boys—not omitting the fifer, now playing a new instrument—were dressed in neat uniform, and stood up in a circle at their music stands, like any other Military Band. They played a march or two, and then we had Cheer, Boys, Cheer, and then we had Yankee Doodle, and we finished, as in loyal duty bound, with God Save the Queen. The band's proficiency was perfectly wonderful, and it was not at all wonderful that the whole body corporate of Short-Timers listened with faces of the liveliest interest and pleasure.

What happened next among the Short-Timers? As if the band had blown me into a great classroom out of their brazen tubes, in a great classroom I found myself now, with the whole choral force of Short-Timers singing the praises of a summer's day to the harmonium, and my small but highly-respected friend the fifer blazing away vocally, as if he had been saving up his wind for the last twelvemonth; also the whole crew of the good ship Nameless swarming up and down the scale as if they had never swarmed up and down the rigging. This done, we threw our

whole power into God bless the Prince of Wales, and blessed his Royal Highness to such an extent that, for my own uncommercial part, I gasped again when it was over. The moment this was done, we formed, with surpassing freshness, into hollow squares, and fell to work at oral lessons, as if we never did, and had never thought of doing, anything else.

Let a veil be drawn over the self-committals into which the Uncommercial Traveller would have been betrayed but for a discreet reticence, coupled with an air of absolute wisdom on the part of that artful personage. Take the square of five, multiply it by fifteen, divide it by three, deduct eight from it, add four dozen to it, give me the result in pence, and tell me how many eggs I could get for it at three farthings apiece. The problem is hardly stated, when a dozen small boys pour out answers. Some wide, some very nearly right, some worked as far as they go with such accuracy as at once to show what link of the chain has been dropped in the hurry. For the moment, none are quite right; but behold a labouring spirit beating the buttons on its corporeal waistcoat in a process of internal calculation, and knitting an accidental bump on its corporeal forehead in a concentration of mental arithmetic! It is my honourable friend (if he will allow me to call him so) the fifer. With right arm eagerly extended in token of being inspired with an answer, and with right leg foremost, the fifer solves the mystery: then recalls both arm and leg, and with bump in ambush awaits the next poser. Take the square of three, multiply it by seven, divide it by four, add fifty to it, take thirteen from it, multiply it by two, double it, give me the result in pence, and say how many halfpence. Wise as the serpent is the four feet of performer on the nearest approach to that instrument, whose right arm instantly appears, and quenches this arithmetical fire. Tell me something about Great Britain, tell me something about its principal productions, tell me something about its ports, tell me something about its seas and rivers, tell me something about coal, iron, cotton, timber, tin, and turpentine. The hollow square bristles with extended right arms; but ever faithful to fact is the fifer, ever wise as the serpent is the performer on that instrument, ever prominently buoyant and brilliant are all members of the band. I observe the player of the cymbals to dash at a sounding answer now and then rather than not cut in at all; but I take that to be in the way of his instrument. All these questions, and many such, are put on the spur of the moment, and by one who has never examined

these boys. The Uncommercial, invited to add another, falteringly demands how many birthdays a man born on the twenty-ninth of February will have had on completing his fiftieth year? A general perception of trap and pitfall instantly arises, and the fifer is seen to retire behind the corduroys of his next neighbours, as perceiving special necessity for collecting himself and communing with his mind. Meanwhile, the wisdom of the serpent suggests that the man will have had only one birthday in all that time, for how can any man have more than one, seeing that he is born once and dies once? The blushing Uncommercial stands corrected, and amends the formula. Pondering ensues, two or three wrong answers are offered, and Cymbals strikes up "six," but doesn't know why. Then, modestly emerging from his Academic Grove of corduroys, appears the fifer, right arm extended, right leg foremost bump irradiated. "Twelve, and two over!"

The feminine Short-Timers passed a similar examination, and very creditably too. Would have done better, perhaps, with a little more geniality on the part of their pupil teacher; for a cold eye, my young friend, and a hard abrupt manner, are not by any means the powerful engines that your innocence supposes them to be. Both girls and boys wrote excellently, from copy and dictation; both could cook; both could mend their own clothes; both could clean up everything about them in an orderly and skilful way, the girls having womanly household knowledge superadded. Order and method began in the songs of the Infant School, which I visited likewise, and they were even in their dwarf degree to be found in the Nursery, where the uncommercial walking-stick was carried off with acclamations, and where "the Doctor"—a medical gentleman of two, who took his degree on the night when he was found at an apothecary's door—did the honours of the establishment with great urbanity and gaiety.

These have long been excellent schools; long before the days of the Short-Time. I first saw them twelve or fifteen years ago. But, since the introduction of the Short-Time system, it has been proved here that eighteen hours a week of book-learning are more profitable than thirty-six, and that the pupils are far quicker and brighter than of yore. The good influences of music on the whole body of children have likewise been surprisingly proved. Obviously another of the immense advantages of the Short-Time system to the cause of good education is the great diminution of its cost, and of the period of time over which it extends. The last

is a most important consideration, as poor parents are always impatient to profit by their children's labour.

It will be objected: Firstly, that this is all very well, but special local advantages and special selection of children must be necessary to such success. Secondly, that this is all very well, but must be very expensive. Thirdly, that this is all very well, but we have no proof of the results, sir, no proof.

On the first head of local advantages and special selection. Would Limehouse Hole be picked out for the site of a Children's Paradise? Or would the legitimate and illegitimate pauper children of the long-shore population of such a river-side district be regarded as unusually favourable specimens to work with? Yet these schools are at Limehouse, and are the Pauper Schools of the Stepney Pauper Union.

On the second head of expense. Would sixpence a week be considered a very large cost for the education of each pupil, including all salaries of teachers and rations of teachers? But, supposing the cost were not sixpence a week, not fivepence? It is FOURPENCE-HALF-PENNY.

On the third head of no proof, sir, no proof. Is there any proof in the facts that Pupil Teachers more in number, and more highly qualified, have been produced here under the Short-Time system than under the Long-Time system? That the Short-Timers, in a writing competition, beat the Long-Timers of a first-class National School? That the sailor boys are in such demand for merchant ships, that whereas, before they were trained, £10 premium used to be given with each boy—too often to some greedy brute of a drunken skipper, who disappeared before the term of apprenticeship was out, if the ill-used boy didn't—captains of the best character now take these boys more than willingly, with no premium at all? That they are also much esteemed in the Royal Navy, which they prefer, "because everything is so neat and clean and orderly?" Or, is there any proof in Naval captains writing, "Your little fellows are all that I can desire?" Or, is there any proof in such testimony as this? "The owner of a vessel called at the school, and said that as his ship was going down Channel on her last voyage, with one of the boys from the school on board, the pilot said, 'It would be as well if the royal were lowered; I wish it were down.' Without waiting for any orders, and unobserved by the pilot, the lad, whom they had taken on board from the school, instantly mounted the mast and lowered the royal, and,

at the next glance of the pilot to the masthead, he perceived that the sail had been let down. He exclaimed, 'Who's done that job?' The owner, who was on board, said, 'That was the little fellow whom I put on board two days ago.' The pilot immediately said, 'Why, where could he have been brought up?' That boy had never seen the sea or been on a real ship before!" Or, is there any proof in these boys being in greater demand for Regimental Bands than the Union can meet? Or, in ninety-eight of them having gone into Regimental Bands in three years? Or, in twelve of them being in the band of one regiment? Or, in the colonel of that regiment writing, "We want six more boys; they are excellent lads?" Or, in one of the boys having risen to be band corporal in the same regiment? Or, in employers of all kinds chorusing, "Give us drilled boys, for they are prompt, obedient, and punctual?" Other proofs I have myself beheld with these uncommercial eyes, though I do not regard myself as having a right to relate in what social positions they have seen respected men and women who were once pauper children of the Stepney Union.

Into what admirable soldiers others of these boys have the capabilities for being turned, I need not point out. Many of them are always ambitious of military service; and once upon a time, when an old boy came back to see the old place, a cavalry soldier all complete, *with his spurs on*, such a yearning broke out to get into cavalry regiments and wear those sublime appendages, that it was one of the greatest excitements ever known in the school. The girls make excellent domestic servants, and at certain periods come back, a score or two at a time, to see the old building, and to take tea with the old teachers, and to hear the old band, and see the old ship with her masts towering up above the neighbouring roofs and chimneys. As to the physical health of these schools, it is so exceptionally remarkable (simply because the sanitary regulations are as good as the other educational arrangements), that when MR. TUFNELL, the Inspector, first stated it in a report, he was supposed, in spite of his high character, to have been betrayed into some extraordinary mistake or exaggeration. In the moral health of these schools—where corporal punishment is unknown—Truthfulness stands high. When the ship was first erected, the boys were forbidden to go aloft until the nets, which are now always there, were stretched as a precaution against accidents. Certain boys, in their eagerness, disobeyed the injunction, got out of window

in the early daylight, and climbed to the mast-head. One boy unfortunately fell, and was killed. There was no clue to the others; but all the boys were assembled, and the Chairman of the Board addressed them. "I promise nothing; you see what a dreadful thing has happened; you know what a grave offence it is that has led to such a consequence; I cannot say what will be done with the offenders; but, boys, you have been trained here, above all things, to respect the truth. I want the truth. Who are the delinquents?" Instantly, the whole number of boys concerned separated from the rest, and stood out.

Now, the head and heart of that gentleman (it is needless to say, a good head and a good heart) have been deeply interested in these schools for many years, and are so still; and the establishment is very fortunate in a most admirable master, and, moreover, the schools of the Stepney Union cannot have got to be what they are without the Stepney Board of Guardians having been earnest and humane men, strongly imbued with a sense of their responsibility. But what one set of men can do in this wise, another set of men can do; and this is a noble example to all other Bodies and Unions, and a noble example to the State. Followed, and enlarged upon by its enforcement on bad parents, it would clear London streets of the most terrible objects they smite the sight with—myriads of little children who awfully reverse Our Saviour's words, and are not of the Kingdom of Heaven, but of the Kingdom of Hell.

Clear the public streets of such shame, and the public conscience of such reproach? Ah! Almost prophetic, surely, the child's jingle:

"When will that be,
Say the bells of Step-ney?"

XXX.

A SMALL STAR IN THE EAST.



HAD been looking, yesternight, through the famous "Dance of Death," and to-day the grim old woodcuts arose in my mind with the new significance of a ghastly monotony not to be found in the original. The weird skeleton rattled along the streets before me, and struck fiercely; but it was never at the pains of assuming a disguise. It played on no dulcimer here,

was crowned with no flowers, waved no plume, minced in no flowing robe or train, lifted no wine-cup, sat at no feast, cast no dice, counted no gold. It was simply a bare, gaunt, famished skeleton, slaying his way along.

The borders of Ratchiff and Stepney, eastward of London, and giving on the impure river, were the scene of this uncompromising dance of death, upon a drizzling November day. A squalid maze of streets, courts, and alleys of miserable houses let out in single rooms. A wilderness of dirt, rags, and hunger. A mud desert, chiefly inhabited by a tribe from whom employment has departed, or to whom it comes but fitfully and rarely. They are not skilled mechanics in anywise. They are but labourers, —dock labourers, water-side labourers, coal-porters, ballast-heavers, such-like hewers of wood and drawers of water. But they have come into existence, and they propagate their wretched race.

One grisly joke alone, methought, the skeleton seemed to play off here. It had stuck election bills on the walls, which the wind and rain had deteriorated into suitable rags. It had even summed up the state of the poll, in chalk, on the shutters of one ruined house. It adjured the free and independent starvers to vote for Thisman and vote for Thatman; not to plump, as they valued the state of parties and the national prosperity (both of great importance to them, I think); but, by returning Thisman and Thatman, each nought without the other, to compound a glorious and immortal whole. Surely the skeleton is nowhere more cruelly ironical in the original monkish idea.

Pondering in my mind the far-seeing schemes of Thisman and Thatman, and of the public blessing called Party, for staying the degeneracy, physical and moral, of many thousands (who shall say how many?) of the English race; for devising employment useful to the community for those who want but to work and live; for equalising rates, cultivating waste lands, facilitating emigration, and, above all things, saving and utilising the on-coming generations, and thereby changing ever-growing national weakness into strength: pondering in my mind, I say, these hopeful exertions, I turned down a narrow street to look into a house or two.

It was a dark street, with a dead wall on one side. Nearly all the outer doors of the houses stood open. I took the first entry, and knocked at a parlour door. Might I come in? I might, if I pleased, sur.

The woman of the room (Irish) had picked up some long strips of wood, about some wharf

or barge; and they had just now been thrust into the otherwise empty grate to make two iron pots boil. There was some fish in one, and there were some potatoes in the other. The flare of the burning wood enabled me to see a table, and a broken chair or so, and some old cheap crockery ornaments about the chimney piece. It was not until I had spoken with the woman a few minutes that I saw a horrible brown heap on the floor in a corner, which, but for previous experience in this dismal wise, I might not have suspected to be "the bed." There was something thrown upon it; and I asked what that was.

"'Tis the poor craythur that stays here, sur, and 'tis very bad she is, and 'tis very bad she' been this long time, and 'tis better she'll never be, and 'tis slape she does all day, and 'tis wake she does all night, and 'tis the lead, sur."

"The what?"

"The lead, sur. Sure 'tis the lead-mills, where the women gets took on at eighteen-pence a day, sur, when they makes application early enough, and is lucky and wanted; and 'tis lead-pisoned she is, sur, and some of them gets lead-pisoned soon, and some of them gets lead-pisoned later, and some, but not many, niver; and 'tis all according to the constitooshun, sur, and some constitooshuns is strong, and some is weak; and her constitooshun is lead-pisoned, bad as can be, sur; and her brain is coming out at her ear, and it hurts her dreadful; and that's what it is, and niver no more, and niver no less, sur."

The sick young woman moaning here, the speaker bent over her, took a bandage from her head, and threw open a back-door to let in the daylight upon it, from the smallest and most miserable back-yard I ever saw.

"That's what cooms from her, sur, being lead-pisoned; and it cooms from her night and day, the poor, sick craythur; and the pain of it is dreadful, and God he knows that my husband has walked the sthreets these four days, being a laborer, and is walking them now, and is ready to work, and no work for him, and no fire and no food but the bit in the pot, and no more than ten shillings in a fortnight; God be good to us! and it is poor we are, and dark it is and could it is indeed."

Knowing that I could compensate myself thereafter for my self-denial, if I saw fit, I had resolved that I would give nothing in the course of these visits. I did this to try the people. I may state at once that my closest observation could not defect any indication whatever of an expectation that I would give money; they

were grateful to be talked to about their miserable affairs, and sympathy was plainly a comfort to them; but they neither asked for money in any case, nor showed the least trace of surprise or disappointment or resentment at my giving none.

The woman's married daughter had by this time come down, from her room on the floor above, to join in the conversation. She herself had been to the lead-mills very early that morning to be "took on," but had not succeeded. She had four children; and her husband, also a water-side labourer, and then out seeking work, seemed in no better case as to finding it than her father. She was English, and by nature of a buxom figure and cheerful. Both in her poor dress and in her mother's there was an effort to keep up some appearance of neatness. She knew all about the sufferings of the unfortunate invalid, and all about the lead-poisoning, and how the symptoms came on, and how they grew,—having often seen them. The very smell, when you stood inside the door of the works, was enough to knock you down, she said; yet she was going back again to get "took on." What could she do? Better be ulcerated and paralysed for eighteen-pence a day, while it lasted, than see the children starve.

A dark and squalid cupboard in this room, touching the back-door and all manner of offence, had been for some time the sleeping-place of the sick young woman. But the nights being now wintry, and the blankets and coverlets "gone to the leaving shop," she lay all night where she lay all day, and was lying then. The woman of the room, her husband, this most miserable patient, and two others, lay on the one brown heap together for warmth.

"God bless you, sir, and thank you!" were the parting words from these people,—gratefully spoken too,—with which I left this place.

Some streets away, I tapped at another parlor door on another ground-floor. Looking in, I found a man, his wife, and four children, sitting at a washing-stool by way of table, at their dinner of bread and infused tea-leaves. There was a very scanty cinderous fire in the grate by which they sat; and there was a tent bedstead in the room, with a bed upon it and a coverlet. The man did not rise when I went in, nor during my stay, but civilly inclined his head on my pulling off my hat, and, in answer to my inquiry whether I might ask him a question or two, said, "Certainly." There being a window at each end of this room, back and front, it might have been ventilated; but it was shut up tight, to keep the cold out, and was very sickening.

The wife, an intelligent, quick woman, rose and stood at her husband's elbow; and he glanced up at her as if for help. It soon appeared that he was rather deaf. He was a slow, simple fellow of about thirty.

"What was he by trade?"

"Gentleman asks what are you by trade, John?"

"I am a boiler-maker;" looking about him with an exceedingly perplexed air, as if for a boiler that had unaccountably vanished.

"He ain't a mechanic, you understand, sir," the wife put in: "he's only a labourer."

"Are you in work?"

He looked up at his wife again. "Gentleman says are you in work, John?"

"In work!" cried this forlorn boiler-maker, staring aghast at his wife, and then working his vision's way very slowly round to me: "Lord, no!"

"Ah, he ain't indeed!" said the poor woman, shaking her head, as she looked at the four children in succession, and then at him.

"Work!" said the boiler-maker, still seeking that evaporated boiler, first in my countenance, then in the air, and then in the features of his second son at his knee: "I wish I *was* in work! I haven't had more than a day's work to do this three weeks."

"How have you lived?"

A faint gleam of admiration lighted up the face of the would-be boiler-maker, as he stretched out the short sleeve of his threadbare canvas jacket, and replied, pointing her out, "On the work of the wife."

I forget where boiler-making had gone to, or where he supposed it had gone to; but he added some resigned information on that head, coupled with an expression of his belief that it was never coming back.

The cheery helpfulness of the wife was very remarkable. She did slop-work; made pea-jackets. She produced the pea-jacket then in hand, and spread it out upon the bed,—the only piece of furniture in the room on which to spread it. She showed how much of it she made, and how much was afterwards finished off by the machine. According to her calculation at the moment, deducting what her trimming cost her, she got for making a pea-jacket tenpence-halfpenny, and she could make one in something less than two days.

But, you see, it come to her through two hands, and of course it didn't come through the second hand for nothing. Why did it come through the second hand at all? Why, this way. The second hand took the risk of the given-out work,

you see. If she had money enough to pay the security deposit,—call it two pound,—she could get the work from the first hand, and so the second would not have to be deducted for. But, having no money at all, the second hand come in and took its profit, and so the whole worked down to tenpence-halfpenny. Having explained all this with great intelligence, even with some little pride, and without a whine or murmur, she folded her work again, sat down by her husband's side at the washing-stool, and resumed her dinner of dry bread. Mean as the meal was, on the bare board, with its old gallipots for cups, and what not other sordid make-shifts; shabby as the woman was in dress, and toning down towards the Bosjesman colour, with want of nutriment and washing,—there was positively a dignity in her, as the family anchor just holding the poor shipwrecked boiler-maker's bark. When I left the room, the boiler-maker's eyes were slowly turned towards her, as if his last hope of ever again seeing that vanished boiler lay in her direction.

These people had never applied for parish relief but once; and that was when the husband met with a disabling accident at his work.

Not many doors from here, I went into a room on the first floor. The woman apologised for its being in "an untidy mess." The day was Saturday, and she was boiling the children's clothes in a saucepan on the hearth. There was nothing else into which she could have put them. There was no crockery, or tinware, or tub, or bucket. There was an old gallipot or two, and there was a broken bottle or so, and there were some broken boxes for seats. The last small scraping of coals left was raked together in a corner of the floor. There were some rags in an open cupboard, also on the floor. In a corner of the room was a crazy old French bedstead, with a man lying on his back upon it in a ragged pilot jacket, and rough oil-skin fantail hat. The room was perfectly black. It was difficult to believe, at first, that it was not purposely coloured black, the walls were so begrimed.

As I stood opposite the woman boiling the children's clothes,—she had not even a piece of soap to wash them with,—and apologising for her occupation, I could take in all these things without appearing to notice them, and could even correct my inventory. I had missed, at the first glance, some half a pound of bread in the otherwise empty safe, an old red ragged crinoline hanging on the handle of the door by which I had entered, and certain fragments of rusty iron scattered on the floor, which looked

like broken tools and a piece of stove-pipe. A child stood looking on. On the box nearest to the fire sat two younger children; one a delicate and pretty little creature, whom the other sometimes kissed.

This woman, like the last, was woefully shabby, and was degenerating to the Bosjesman complexion. But her figure, and the ghost of a certain vivacity about her, and the spectre of a dimple in her cheek, carried my memory strangely back to the old days of the Adelphi Theatre, London, when Mrs. Fitzwilliam was the friend of Victorine.

"May I ask you what your husband is?"

"He's a coal-porter, sir,"—with a glance and a sigh towards the bed.

"Is he out of work?"

"Oh yes, sir! and work's at all times very, very scanty with him; and now he's laid up."

"It's my legs," said the man upon the bed. "I'll unroll 'em." And immediately began.

"Have you any older children?"

"I have a daughter that does the needlework, and I have a son that does what he can. She's at her work now, and he's trying for work."

"Do they live here?"

"They sleep here. They can't afford to pay more rent, and so they come here at night. The rent is very hard upon us. It's rose upon us, too, now,—sixpence a week,—on account of these new changes in the law about the rates. We are a week behind; the landlord's been shaking and rattling at that door frightfully; he says he'll turn us out. I don't know what's to come of it."

The man upon the bed ruefully interposed, "Here's my legs. The skin's broke, besides the swelling. I have had a many kicks, working, one way and another."

He looked at his legs (which were much discoloured and misshapen) for awhile, and then, appearing to remember that they were not popular with his family, rolled them up again, as if they were something in the nature of maps or plans that were not wanted to be referred to, lay hopelessly down on his back once more with his fantail hat over his face, and stirred not.

"Do your eldest son and daughter sleep in that cupboard?"

"Yes," replied the woman.

"With the children?"

"Yes. We have to get together for warmth. We have little to cover us."

"Have you nothing by you to eat but the piece of bread I see there?"

"Nothing. And we had the rest of the loaf

for our breakfast, with water. I don't know what's to come of it."

"Have you no prospect of improvement?"

"If my eldest son earns anything to-day, he'll bring it home. Then we shall have something to eat to-night, and may be able to do something towards the rent. If not, I don't know what's to come of it."

"This is a sad state of things."

"Yes, sir; it's a hard, hard life. Take care of the stairs as you go, sir,—they're broken,—and good day, sir!"

These people had a mortal dread of entering the workhouse, and received no out-of-door relief.

In another room, in still another tenement, I found a very decent woman with five children,—the last a baby, and she herself a patient of the parish doctor,—to whom, her husband being in the hospital, the Union allowed, for the support of herself and family, four shillings a week and five loaves. I suppose when Thisman, M.P., and Thatman, M.P., and the Public-blessing Party, lay their heads together in course of time, and come to an equalisation of rating, she may go down to the dance of death to the tune of sixpence more.

I could enter no other houses for that one while, for I could not bear the contemplation of the children. Such heart as I had summoned to sustain me against the miseries of the adults failed me when I looked at the children. I saw how young they were, how hungry, how serious and still. I thought of them sick and dying in those lairs. I think of them dead without anguish; but to think of them so suffering and so dying quite unmanned me.

Down by the river's bank in Ratcliff, I was turning upward by a side-street, therefore, to regain the railway, when my eyes rested on the inscription across the road, "East London Children's Hospital." I could scarcely have seen an inscription better suited to my frame of mind and I went across, and went straight in.

I found the Children's Hospital established in an old sail-loft or storehouse, of the roughest nature, and on the simplest means. There were trap-doors in the floors, where goods had been hoisted up and down; heavy feet and heavy weights had started every knot in the well-trodden planking; inconvenient bulks and beams and awkward staircases perplexed my passage through the wards. But I found it airy, sweet, and clean. In its seven-and-thirty beds I saw but little beauty; for starvation in the second or third generation takes a pinched

look: but I saw the sufferings both of infancy and childhood tenderly assuaged; I heard the little patients answering to pet playful names; the light touch of a delicate lady laid bare the wasted sticks of arms for me to pity; and the claw-like little hands, as she did so, twined themselves lovingly around her wedding-ring.

One baby mite there was as pretty as any of Raphael's angels. The tiny head was bandaged for water on the brain; and it was suffering with acute bronchitis too, and made from time to time a plaintive, though not impatient or complaining, little sound. The smooth curve of the cheeks and of the chin was faultless in its condensation of infantine beauty, and the large bright eyes were most lovely. It happened, as I stopped at the foot of the bed, that these eyes rested upon mine with that wistful expression of wondering thoughtfulness which we all know sometimes in very little children. They remained fixed on mine, and never turned from me while I stood there. When the utterance of that plaintive sound shook the little form, the gaze still remained unchanged. I felt as though the child implored me to tell the story of the little hospital in which it was sheltered to any gentle heart I could address. Laying my world-worn hand upon the little unmarked clasped hand at the chin, I gave it a silent promise that I would do so.

A gentleman and lady, a young husband and wife, have bought and fitted up this building for its present noble use, and have quietly settled themselves in it as its medical officers and directors. Both have had considerable practical experience of medicine and surgery; he as house surgeon of a great London Hospital; she as a very earnest student, tested by severe examination, and also as a nurse of the sick poor during the prevalence of cholera.

With every qualification to lure them away, with youth and accomplishments and tastes and habits that can have no response in any breast near them, close begirt by every repulsive circumstance inseparable from such a neighbourhood, there they dwell. They live in the hospital itself, and their rooms are on its first floor. Sitting at their dinner-table, they could hear the cry of one of the children in pain. The lady's piano, drawing materials, books, and other such evidences of refinement, are as much a part of the rough place as the iron bedsteads of the little patients. They are put to shifts for room, like passengers on board ship. The dispenser of medicines (attracted to them not by self-interest, but by their own magnetism and that of their cause) sleeps in a recess in the dining-

room, and has his washing apparatus in the sideboard.

Their contented manner of making the best of the things around them I found so pleasantly inseparable from their usefulness ! Their pride in this partition that we put up ourselves, or in that partition that we took down, or in that other partition that we moved, or in the stove that was given us for the waiting-room, or in our nightly conversion of the little consulting-room into a smoking-room ! Their admiration of the situation, if we could only get rid of its one objectionable incident, the coal-yard at the back ! "Our hospital carriage, presented by a friend, and very useful." That was my presentation to a perambulator, for which a coach-house had been discovered in a corner down-stairs, just large enough to hold it. Coloured prints, in all stages of preparation for being added to those already decorating the wards, were plentiful ; a charming wooden phenomenon of a bird, with an impossible top-knot, who ducked his head when you set a counter-weight going, had been inaugurated as a public statue that very morning ; and trotting about among the beds, on familiar terms with all the patients, was a comical mongrel dog, called Poodles. This comical dog (quite a tonic in himself) was found characteristically starving at the door of the institution, and was taken in and fed, and has lived here ever since. An admirer of his mental endowments has presented him with a collar bearing the legend, "Judge not Poodles by external appearances." He was merrily wagging his tail on a boy's pillow when he made this modest appeal to me.

When this hospital was first opened, in January of the present year, the people could not possibly conceive but that somebody paid for the services rendered there ; and were disposed to claim them as a right, and to find fault if out of temper. They soon came to understand the case better, and have much increased in gratitude. The mothers of the patients avail themselves very freely of the visiting rules ; the fathers often on Sundays. There is an unreasonable (but still, I think, touching and intelligible) tendency in the parents to take a child away to its wretched home, if on the point of death. One boy who had been thus carried off on a rainy night, when in a violent state of inflammation, and who had been afterwards brought back, had been recovered with exceeding difficulty ; but he was a jolly boy, with a specially strong interest in his dinner, when I saw him.

Insufficient food and unwholesome living are

the main causes of disease among these small patients. So nourishment, cleanliness, and ventilation are the main remedies. Discharged patients are looked after, and invited to come and dine now and then ; so are certain fascinating creatures who were never patients. Both the lady and the gentleman are well acquainted, not only with the histories of the patients and their families, but with the characters and circumstances of great numbers of their neighbours : of these they keep a register. It is their common experience that people, sinking down by inches into deeper and deeper poverty, will conceal it, even from them, if possible, unto the very last extremity.

The nurses of this hospital are all young—ranging, say, from nineteen to four-and-twenty. They have even within these narrow limits what many well-endowed hospitals would not give them, a comfortable room of their own in which to take their meals. It is a beautiful truth, that interest in the children, and sympathy with their sorrows, bind these young women to their places far more strongly than any other consideration could. The best skilled of the nurses came originally from a kindred neighbourhood, almost as poor ; and she knew how much the work was needed. She is a fair dressmaker. The hospital cannot pay her as many pounds in the year as there are months in it ; and one day the lady regarded it as a duty to speak to her about her improving her prospects, and following her trade. No, she said : she could never be so useful or so happy elsewhere any more : she must stay among the children. And she stays. One of the nurses, as I passed her, was washing a baby boy. Liking her pleasant face, I stopped to speak to her charge—a common, bullet-headed, frowning charge enough, laying hold of his own nose with a slippery grasp, and staring very solemnly out of a blanket. The melting of the pleasant face into delighted smiles, as this young gentleman gave an unexpected kick, and laughed at me, was almost worth my previous pain.

An affecting play was acted in Paris years ago, called "The Children's Doctor." As I parted from my children's Doctor now in question, I saw in his easy black necktie, in his loose buttoned black frock-coat, in his pensive face, in the flow of his dark hair, in his eyelashes, in the very turn of his moustache, the exact realisation of the Paris artist's ideal as it was presented on the stage. But no romancer that I know of has had the boldness to prefigure the life and home of this young husband and young wife in the Children's Hospital in the East of London,

I came away from Rateliff by the Stepney railway station to the terminus at Fenchurch Street. Any one who will reverse that route may retrace my steps.

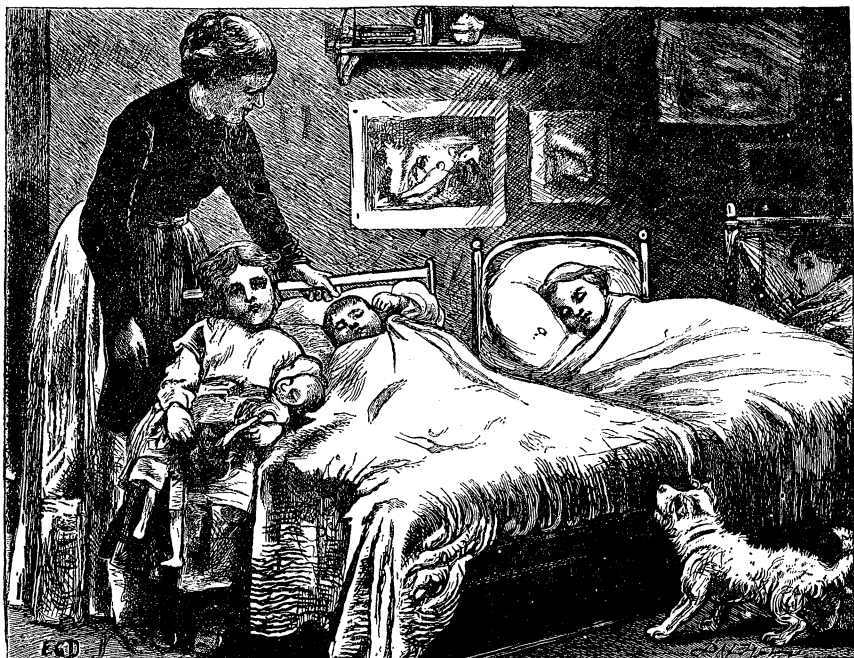
XXXI.

ABOARD SHIP.

MY journeys as Uncommercial Traveller for the firm of Human Interest Brothers have not slackened since I last reported of them,

but have kept me continually on the move. I remain in the same idle employment. I never solicit an order; I never get any commission, I am the rolling stone that gathers no moss,—unless any should by chance be found among these samples.

Some half a year ago, I found myself in my idlest, dreamiest, and least accountable condition altogether, on board ship, in the harbour of the city of New York, in the United States of America. Of all the good ships afloat, mine was the good steamship *RUSSIA*, Capt. Cook,



"TROTTER ABOUT AMONG THE BEDS, ON FAMILIAR TERMS WITH ALL THE PATIENTS, WAS A COMICAL MONGREL DOG, CALLED FOOBLEES."

Cunard Line, bound for Liverpool. What more could I wish for?

I had nothing to wish for but a prosperous passage. My salad days, when I was green of visage and sea-sick, being gone with better things (and no worse), no coming event cast its shadow before.

I might, but a few moments previously, have imitated Sterne, and said, "'And yet, methinks,

Eugenius,'—laying my forefinger wistfully on his coat-sleeve, thus,—'and yet, methinks, Eugenius, 'tis but sorry work to part with thee, for what fresh fields, . . . my dear Eugenius, . . . can be fresher than thou art, and in what pastures new shall I find Eliza, or call her, Eugenius, if thou wilt, Annie?'"—I say I might have done this; but Eugenius was gone, and I hadn't done it.

I was resting on a sky-light on the hurricane deck, watching the working of the ship very slowly about, that she might head for England. It was high noon on a most brilliant day in April, and the beautiful bay was glorious and glowing. Full many a time, on shore there, had I seen the snow come down, down, down (itself like down), until it lay deep in all the ways of men, and particularly, as it seemed, in my way, for I had not gone dry-shod many hours for months. Within two or three days last past had I watched the feathery fall setting in with the ardour of a new idea, instead of dragging, at the skirts of a worn-out winter, and permitting glimpses of a fresh young spring. But a bright sun and a clear sky had melted the snow in the great crucible of nature; and it had been poured out again that morning over sea and land, transformed into myriads of gold and silver sparkles.

The ship was fragrant with flowers. Something of the old Mexican passion for flowers may have gradually passed into North America, where flowers are luxuriously grown and tastefully combined in the richest profusion; but, be that as it may, such gorgeous farewells in flowers had come on board, that the small officer's cabin on deck, which I tenanted, bloomed over into the adjacent scuppers, and banks of other flowers that it couldn't hold made a garden of the unoccupied tables in the passengers' saloon. These delicious scents of the shore, mingling with the fresh airs of the sea, made the atmosphere a dreamy, an enchanting one. And so, with the watch aloft setting all the sails, and with the screw below revolving at a mighty rate, and occasionally giving the ship an angry shake for resisting, I fell into my idlest ways, and lost myself.

As, for instance, whether it was I lying there, or some other entity even more mysterious, was a matter I was far too lazy to look into. What did it signify to me if it were I? or to the more mysterious entity, if it were he? Equally as to the remembrances that drowsily floated by me, or by him, why ask when or where the things happened? Was it not enough that they befell at some time, somewhere?

There was that assisting at the church service on board another steamship, one Sunday, in a stiff breeze. Perhaps on the passage out. No matter. Pleasant to hear the ship's bells go as like church-bells, as they could; pleasant to see the watch off duty mustered and come in: best hats, best Guernseys, washed hands and faces, smoothed heads. But then arose a set of circumstances so rampantly comical, that no check

which the gravest intentions could put upon them would hold them in hand. Thus the scene. Some seventy passengers assembled at the saloon tables. Prayer-books on tables. Ship rolling heavily. Pause. No minister. Rumour has related that a modest young clergyman on board has responded to the captain's request that he will officiate. Pause again, and very heavy rolling.

Closed double doors suddenly burst open, and two strong stewards skate in, supporting minister between them. General appearance as of somebody picked up drunk and incapable, and under conveyance to station-house. Stoppage, pause, and particularly heavy rolling. Stewards watch their opportunity, and balance themselves, but cannot balance minister; who, struggling with a drooping head and a backward tendency, seems determined to return below, while they are as determined that he shall be got to the reading-desk in mid-saloon. Desk portable, sliding away down a long table, and aiming itself at the breasts of various members of the congregation. Here the double doors, which have been carefully closed by other stewards, fly open again, and worldly passenger tumbles in, seemingly with pale-ale designs: who, seeking friend, says, "Joe!" Perceiving incongruity, says, "Hullo! Beg yer pardon!" and tumbles out again. All this time the congregation have been breaking up into sects,—as the manner of congregations often is,—each sect sliding away by itself, and all pounding the weakest sect which slid first into the corner. Utmost point of dissent soon attained in every corner, and violent rolling. Stewards at length make a dash; conduct minister to the mast in the centre of the saloon, which he embraces with both arms; skate out; and leave him in that condition to arrange affairs with flock.

There was another Sunday, when an officer of the ship read the service. It was quiet and impressive, until we fell upon the dangerous and perfectly unnecessary experiment of striking up a hymn. After it was given out, we all rose, but everybody left it to somebody else to begin. Silence resulting, the officer (no singer himself) rather reproachfully gave us the first line again, upon which a rosy pippin of an old gentleman, remarkable throughout the passage for his cheerful politeness, gave a little stamp with his boot (as if he were leading off a country dance), and blithely warbled us into a show of joining. At the end of the first verse we became, through these tactics, so much refreshed and encouraged, that none of us, howsoever unmelodious, would submit to be left out of the second verse; while,

as to the third, we lifted up our voices in a sacred howl that left it doubtful whether we were the more boastful of the sentiments we united in professing, or of professing them with a most discordant defiance of time and tune.

"Lord bless us!" thought I, when the fresh remembrance of these things made me laugh heartily alone in the dead water-gurgling waste of the night, what time I was wedged into my berth by a wooden bar, or I must have rolled out of it, "what errand was I then upop, and to what Abyssinian point had public events then marched? No matter as to me. And as to them, if the wonderful popular rage for a play-thing (utterly confounding in its inscrutable unreason) had not then lighted on a poor young savage boy, and a poor old screw of a horse, and hauled the first off by the hair of his princely head to 'inspect' British volunteers, and hauled the second off by the hair of his equine tail to the Crystal Palace, why so much the better for all of us outside Bedlam!"

So, sticking to the ship, I was at the trouble of asking myself would I like to show the grog distribution in "the fiddle" at noon to the Grand United Amalgamated Total Abstinence Society? Yes, I think I should. I think it would do them good to smell the rum under the circumstances. Over the grog, mixed in a bucket, presides the boatswain's mate, small tin can in hand. Enter the crew, the guilty consumers, the grown-up brood of Giant Despair, in contradistinction to the band of youthful angel Hope. Some in boots, some in leggings, some in tarpaulin overalls, some in frocks, some in pea-coats, a very few in jackets, most with sou'-wester hats, all with something rough and rugged round the throat; all dripping salt water where they stand; all pelted by weather, besmeared with grease, and blackened by the sooty rigging.

Each man's knife in its sheath in his girdle, loosened for dinner. As the first man, with a knowingly-kindled eye, watches the filling of the poisoned chalice (truly but a very small tin mug, to be prosaic), and, tossing back his head, tosses the contents into himself, and passes the empty chalice, and passes on, so the second man, with an anticipatory wipe of his mouth on sleeve or handkerchief, bides his turn, and drinks and hands and passes on, in whom, and in each as his turn approaches, beams a knowingly-kindled eye, a brighter temper, and a suddenly-awakened tendency to be jocose with some shipmate. Nor do I even observe that the man in charge of the ship's lamps, who, in right of his office, has a double allowance of poisoned chalices, seems thereby vastly degraded, even though he empties the

chalices into himself, one after the other, much as if he were delivering their contents at some absorbent establishment in which he had no personal interest. But vastly comforted I note them all to be, on deck presently, even to the circulation of redder blood in their cold blue knuckles; and when I look up at them lying out on the yards, and holding on for life among the beating sails, I cannot for *my* life see the justice of visiting on them—or on me—the drunken crimes of any number of criminals arraigned at the heaviest of assizes.

Abetting myself in my idle humour, I closed my eyes, and recalled life on board of one of those mail packets, as I lay, part of that day, in the Bay of New York, O! The regular life began—mine always did, for I never got to sleep afterwards—with the rigging of the pump while it was yet dark, and washing down of decks. Any enormous giant at a prodigious hydropathic establishment, conscientiously undergoing the water cure in all its departments, and extremely particular about cleaning his teeth, would make those noises. Swash, splash, scrub, rub, tooth-brush, bubble, swash, splash, bubble, tooth-brush, splash, splash, bubble, rub. Then the day would break, and, descending from my berth by a graceful ladder composed of half-opened drawers beneath it, I would reopen my outer dead-light and my inner sliding window (closed by a watchman during the water-cure), and would look out at the long-rolling, lead-coloured, white-topped waves over which the dawn, on a cold winter morning, cast a level lonely glance, and through which the ship fought her melancholy way at a terrific rate. And now, lying down again, awaiting the season for broiled ham and tea, I would be compelled to listen to the voice of conscience,—the screw.

It might be, in some cases, no more than the voice of stomach; but I called it in my fancy by the higher name. Because it seemed to me that we were all of us, all day long, endeavouring to stifle the voice. Because it was under everybody's pillow, everybody's plate, everybody's camp-stool, everybody's book, everybody's occupation. Because we pretended not to hear it, especially at meal-times, evening whist, and morning conversation on deck; but it was always among us in an under monotone, not to be drowned in pea-soup, not to be shuffled with cards, not to be diverted by books, not to be knitted into any pattern, not to be walked away from. It was smoked in the weediest cigar, and drunk in the strongest cocktail; it was conveyed on deck at noon with limp ladies, who lay there in their wrappers

until the stars shone; it waited at table with the stewards; nobody could put it out with the lights. It was considered (as on shore) ill bred to acknowledge the voice of conscience. It was not polite to mention it. One squally day in amiable gentleman in love gave much offence to a surrounding circle, including the object of his attachment, by saying of it, after it had goaded him over two easy-chairs and a skylight, "Screw!"

Sometimes it would appear subdued. In fleeting moments, when bubbles of champagne pervaded the nose, or when there was "hot pot" in the bill of fare, or when an old dish we had had regularly every day was described in that official document by a new name,—under such excitements, one would almost believe it hushed. The ceremony of washing plates on deck, performed after every meal by a circle as of ringers of crockery triple-bob majors for a prize, would keep it down. Hauling the reel, taking the sun at noon, posting the twenty-four hours' run, altering the ship's time by the meridian, casting the waste food overboard, and attracting the eager gulls that followed in our wake,—these events would suppress it for awhile. But, the instant any break or pause took place in any such diversion, the voice would be at it again, importuning us to the last extent. A newly-married young pair, who walked the deck affectionately some twenty miles per day, would, in the full flush of their exercise, suddenly become stricken by it, and stand trembling, but otherwise immovable, under its reproaches.

When this terrible monitor was most severe with us was when the time approached for our retiring to our dens for the night; when the lighted candles in the saloon grew fewer and fewer; when the deserted glasses with spoons in them grew more and more numerous, when waifs of toasted cheese, and strays of sardines fried in batter, slid languidly to and fro in the table-racks; when the man who always read had shut up his book, and blown out his candle; when the man who always talked had ceased from troubling; when the man who was always medically reported as going to have delirium tremens had put it off till to-morrow; when the man who every night devoted himself to a mid-night smoke on deck two hours in length, and who every night was in bed within ten minutes afterwards, was buttoning himself up in his third coat for his hardy vigil: for then, as we fell off one by one, and, entering our several hatches, came into a peculiar atmosphere of bilge-water and Windsor soap, the voice would shake us to

the centre. Woe to us when we sat down on our sofa, watching the swinging candle for ever trying and re-trying to stand upon his head! or our coat upon its peg, imitating us as we appeared in our gymnastic days by sustaining itself horizontally from the wall, in emulation of the lighter and more facile towels! Then would the voice especially claim us for its prey, and send us all to pieces.

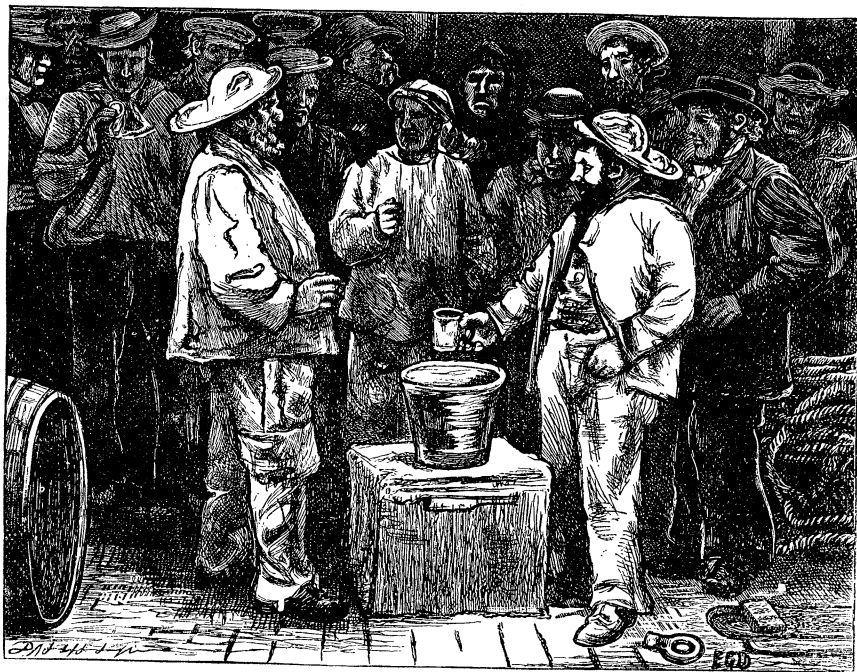
Lights out, we in our berths, and the wind rising, the voice grows angrier and deeper. Under the mattress and under the pillow, under the sofa and under the washing-stand, under the ship and under the sea, seeming to rise from the foundations under the earth with every scoop of the great Atlantic (and oh! why scoop so?), always the voice. Vain to deny its existence in the night season; impossible to be hard of hearing; screw, screw, screw! Sometimes it lifts out of the water and revolves with a whirr, like a ferocious firework,—except that it never expends itself, but is always ready to go off again; sometimes it seems to be in anguish and shivers; sometimes it seems to be terrified by its last plunge, and has a fit which causes it to struggle, quiver, and for an instant stop. And now the ship sets in rolling, as only ships so fiercely screwed through time and space, day and night, fair weather and foul, *can* roll.

Did she ever take a roll before like that last? Did she ever take a roll before like this worse one that is coming now? Here is the partition at my ear down in the deep on the lee side. Are we ever coming up again together? I think not; the partition and I are so long about it that I really do believe we have overdone it this time. Heavens, what a scoop! What a deep scoop, what a hollow scoop, what a long scoop! Will it ever end, and can we bear the heavy mass of water we have taken on board, and which has let loose all the table furniture in the officers' mess, and has beaten open the door of the little passage between the purser and me, and is swashing about even there and even here? The purser snores reassuringly, and the ship's bells striking, I hear the cheerful "All's well!" of the watch musically given back the length of the deck, as the lately-diving partition, now high in air, tries (unsoftened by what we have gone through together) to force me out of bed and berth.

"All's well!" Comforting to know, though surely all might be better. Put aside the rolling and the rush of water, and think of darting through such darkness with such velocity. Think of any other similar object coming in the opposite direction!

Whether there may be an attraction in two such moving bodies out at sea, which may help accident to bring them into collision? Thoughts, too, arise (the voice never silent all the while, but marvellously suggestive) of the gulf below; of the strange unfruitful mountain ranges and deep valleys over which we are passing; of monstrous fish midway; of the ship's suddenly altering her course on her own account, and with a wild plunge settling down, and making *that* voyage with a crew of dead dis-

coverers. Now, too, one recalls an almost universal tendency on the part of passengers to stumble, at some time or other in the day, on the topic of a certain large steamer making this same run, which was lost at sea, and never heard of more. Everybody has seemed under a spell, compelling approach to the threshold of the grim subject, stoppage, discomfiture, and pretence of never having been near it. The boatswain's whistle sounds! A change in the wind, hoarse orders issuing, and the watch very busy.



"OVER THE GROG, MIXED IN A BUCKET, PRESIDES THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE."

Sails come crashing home overhead, ropes (that seem all knot) ditto; every man engaged appears to have twenty feet, with twenty times the average amount of stamping power in each. Gradually the noise slackens, the hoarse cries die away, the boatswain's whistle softens into the soothing and contented notes, which rather reluctantly admit that the job is done for the time, and the voice sets in again.

Thus come unintelligible dreams of up-hill and down, and swinging and swaying, until con-

sciousness revives of atmospherical Windsor soap and bilge-water, and the voice announces that the giant has come for the water cure again.

Such were my fanciful reminiscences as I lay, part of that day, in the Bay of New York, O! Also as we passed clear of the Narrows, and got out to sea; also in many an idle hour at sea in sunny weather! At length the observations and computations showed that we should make the coast of Ireland to-night. So I stood watch

on deck all night to-night, to see how we made the coast of Ireland.

Very dark, and the sea most brilliantly phosphorescent. Great way on the ship, and double look-out kept. Vigilant captain on the bridge, vigilant first officer looking over the port side, vigilant second officer standing by the quarter-master at the compass, vigilant third officer posted at the stern-rail with a lantern. No passengers on the quiet decks, but expectation everywhere nevertheless. The two men at the wheel very steady, very serious, and very prompt to answer orders. An order issued sharply now and then, and echoed back; otherwise the night drags slowly, silently, and with no change.

All of a sudden, at the blank hour of two in the morning, a vague movement of relief from a long strain expresses itself in all hands; the third officer's lantern twinkles, and he fires a rocket, and another rocket. A sullen solitary light is pointed out to me in the black sky yonder. A change is expected in the light, but none takes place. "Give them two more rockets, Mr. Vigilant." Two more, and a blue-light burnt. All eyes watch the light again. At last a little toy sky-rocket is flashed up from it; and, even as that small streak in the darkness dies away, we are telegraphed to Queenstown, Liverpool, and London, and back again under the ocean to America.

Then up come the half-dozen passengers who are going ashore at Queenstown, and up comes the mail agent in charge of the bags, and up come the men who are to carry the bags into the mail tender that will come off for them out of the harbour. Lamps and lanterns gleam here and there about the decks, and impeding bulks are knocked away with handspikes; and the port-side bulwark, barren but a moment ago, bursts into a crop of heads of seamen, stewards, and engineers.

The light begins to be gained upon, begins to be alongside, begins to be left astern. More rockets, and, between us and the land, steams beautifully the Inman steamship *City of Paris*, for New York, outward bound. We observe with complacency that the wind is dead against her (it being *with* us), and that she rolls and pitches. (The sickest passenger on board is the most delighted by this circumstance.) Time rushes by as we rush on; and now we see the light in Queenstown Harbour, and now the lights of the mail tender coming out to us. What vagaries the mail tender performs on the way, in every point of the compass, especially in those where she has no business, and why she

performs them, Heaven only knows! At length she is seen plunging within a cable's length of our port broadside, and is being roared at through our speaking trumpets to do this thing, and not to do that, and to stand by the other, as if she were a very demented tender indeed. Then, we slackening amidst a deafening roar of steam, this much-abused tender is made fast to us by hawsers, and the men in readiness carry the bags aboard, and return for more, bending under their burdens, and looking just like the pasteboard figures of the miller and his men in the theatre of our boyhood, and comporting themselves almost as unsteadily. All the while the unfortunate tender plunges high and low, and is roared at. Then the Queenstown passengers are put on board of her, with infinite plunging and roaring, and the tender gets heaved up on the sea to that surprising extent that she looks within an ace of washing aboard of us, high and dry. Roared at with contumely to the last, this wretched tender is at length let go, with a final plunge of great ignominy, and falls spinning into our wake.

The voice of conscience resumed its dominion as the day climbed up the sky, and kept by all of us passengers into port; kept by us as we passed other lighthouses, and dangerous islands off the coast, where some of the officers, with whom I stood my watch, had gone ashore in sailing ships in fogs (and of which, by that token, they seem to have quite an affectionate remembrance), and past the Welsh coast, and past the Cheshire coast, and past everything and everywhere lying between our ship and her own special dock in the Mersey. Off which, at last, at nine of the clock, on a fair evening early in May, we stopped, and the voice ceased. A very curious sensation, not unlike having my own ears stopped, ensued upon that silence; and it was with a no less curious sensation that I went over the side of the good Cunard ship *Russia* (whom prosperity attend through all her voyages!) and surveyed the outer hull of the gracious monster that the voice had inhabited. So, perhaps, shall we all, in the spirit, one day survey the frame that held the busier voice from which my vagrant fancy derived this similitude.

XXXII.

A LITTLE DINNER IN AN HOUR.

IT fell out, on a day in this last autumn, that I had to go down from London to a place of seaside resort, on an hour's business,

accompanied by my esteemed friend Bullfinch. Let the place of seaside resort be, for the nonce, called Namelesston.

I had been loitering about Paris in very hot weather, pleasantly breakfasting in the open air in the garden of the Palais Royal or the Tuileries, pleasantly dining in the open air in the Elysian Fields, pleasantly taking my cigar and lemonade in the open air on the Italian Boulevard towards the small hours after midnight. Bullfinch—an excellent man of business—had summoned me back across the Channel, to transact this said hour's business at Namelesston; and thus it fell out that Bullfinch and I were in a railway carriage together on our way to Namelesston, each with his return ticket in his waistcoat pocket.

Says Bullfinch, "I have a proposal to make. Let us dine at the Temeraire."

I asked Bullfinch, did he recommend the Temeraire? inasmuch as I had not been rated on the books of the Temeraire for many years.

Bullfinch declined to accept the responsibility of recommending the Temeraire, but, on the whole, was rather sanguine about it. He "seemed to remember," Bullfinch said, that he had dined well there. A plain dinner, but good. Certainly not like a Parisian dinner (here Bullfinch obviously became the prey of want of confidence), but of its kind very fair.

I appeal to Bullfinch's intimate knowledge of my wants and ways to decide whether I was usually ready to be pleased with any dinner, or—for the matter of that—with anything that was fair of its kind, and really what it claimed to be. Bullfinch doing me the honour to respond in the affirmative, I agreed to ship myself as an able trencherman on board the Temeraire.

"Now, our plan shall be this," says Bullfinch with his forefinger at his nose. "As soon as we get to Namelesston, we'll drive straight to the Temeraire, and order a little dinner in an hour. And, as we shall not have more than enough time in which to dispose of it comfortably, what do you say to giving the house the best opportunities of serving it hot and quickly by dining in the coffee-room?"

What I had to say was, Certainly. Bullfinch (who is by nature of a hopeful constitution) then began to babble of green geese. But I checked him in that Falstaffian vein, urging considerations of time and cookery.

In due sequence of events we drove up to the Temeraire, and alighted. A youth in livery received us on the door-step. "Looks well," said Bullfinch confidentially. And then aloud, "Coffee-room!"

The youth in livery (now perceived to be moulty) conducted us to the desired haven, and was enjoined by Bullfinch to send the waiter at once, as we wished to order a little dinner in an hour. Then Bullfinch and I waited for the waiter, until, the waiter continuing to wait in some unknown and invisible sphere of action, we rang for the waiter; which ring produced the waiter, who announced himself as not the waiter who ought to wait upon us, and who didn't wait a moment longer.

So Bullfinch approached the coffee-room door, and melodiously pitching his voice into a bar where two young ladies were keeping the books of the Temeraire, apologetically explained that we wished to order a little dinner in an hour, and that we were debarred from the execution of our inoffensive purpose by consignment to solitude.

Hereupon one of the young ladies rang a bell, which reproduced—at the bar this time—the waiter who was not the waiter who ought to wait upon us; that extraordinary man, whose life seemed consumed in waiting upon people to say that he wouldn't wait upon them, repeated his former protest with great indignation, and retired.

Bullfinch, with a fallen countenance, was about to say to me, "This won't do," when the waiter who ought to wait upon us left off keeping us waiting at last. "Waiter," said Bullfinch piteously, "we have been a long time waiting." The waiter who ought to wait upon us laid the blame upon the waiter who ought not to wait upon us, and said it was all that waiter's fault.

"We wish," said Bullfinch, much depressed, "to order a little dinner in an hour. What can we have?"

"What would you like to have, gentlemen?"

Bullfinch, with extreme mournfulness of speech and action, and with a forlorn old fly-blown bill of fare in his hand which the waiter had given him, and which was a sort of general manuscript index to any cookery-book you please, moved the previous question.

We could have mock-turtle soup, a sole, curry, and roast duck. Agreed. At this table, by this window. Punctually in an hour.

I had been feigning to look out of this window; but I had been taking note of the crumbs on all the tables, the dirty table-cloths, the stuffy, soupy, airless atmosphere, the stale leavings everywhere about, the deep gloom of the waiter who ought to wait upon us, and the stomachache with which a lonely traveller at a distant table in a corner was too evidently afflicted. I now pointed out to Bullfinch the alarming circumstance that this

traveller had *dined*. We hurriedly debated whether, without infringement of good-breeding, we could ask him to disclose if he had partaken of mock turtle, sole, curry, or roast duck? We decided that the thing could not be politely done, and we had set our own stomachs on a cast, and they must stand the hazard of the die.

I hold phrenology, within certain limits, to be true; I am much of the same mind as to the subtler expressions of the hand; I hold physiognomy to be infallible; though all these sciences demand rare qualities in the student. But I also hold that there is no more certain index to personal character than the condition of a set of casters is to the character of any hotel. Knowing, and having often tested this theory of mine, Bullfinch resigned himself to the worst, when, laying aside any remaining veil of disguise, I held up before him in succession the cloudy oil and furry vinegar, the clogged cayenne, the dirty salt, the obscene dregs of soy, and the anchovy sauce in a flannel waistcoat of decomposition.

We went out to transact our business. So inspiring was the relief of passing into the clean and windy streets of Namelesston from the heavy and vapid closeness of the coffee-room of the Temeraire, that hope began to revive within us. We began to consider that perhaps the lonely traveller had taken physic, or done something injudicious to bring his complaint on. Bullfinch remarked that he thought the waiter who ought to wait upon us had brightened a little when suggesting curry; and, although I knew him to have been at that moment the express image of despair, I allowed myself to become elevated in spirits. As we walked by the softly-lapping sea, all the notabilities of Namelesston, who are for ever going up and down with the changelessness of the tides, passed to and fro in procession. Pretty girls on horseback, and with detested riding-masters; pretty girls on foot; mature ladies in hats,—spectacled, strong-minded, and glaring at the opposite or weaker sex. The Stock Exchange was strongly represented, Jerusalem was strongly represented, the bores of the prosier London clubs were strongly represented. Fortune-hunters of all denominations were there, from hirsute insolvency in a curricule, to cloggy-buttoned swindlers in doubtful boots, on the sharp look-out for any likely young gentleman disposed to play a game at billiards round the corner. Masters of languages, their lessons finished for the day, were going to their homes out of sight of the sea; mistresses of accom-

plishments, carrying small portfolios, likewise tripped homeward; pairs of scholastic pupils, two and two, went languidly along the beach, surveying the face of the waters as if waiting for some Ark to come and take them off. Spectres of the George the Fourth days flitted unsteadily among the crowd, bearing the outward semblance of ancient dandies, of every one of whom it might be said, not that he had one leg in the grave, or both legs, but that he was steeped in grave to the summit of his high shirt collar, and had nothing real about him but his bones. Alone stationary in the midst of all the movements, the Namelesston boatmen leaned against the railings and yawned, and looked out to sea, or looked at the moored fishing-boats and at nothing. Such is the unchanging manner of life with this nursery of our hardy seamen; and very dry nurses they are, and always wanting something to drink. The only two nautical personages detached from the railing were the two fortunate possessors of the celebrated monstrous unknown barking fish, just caught (frequently just caught off Namelesston), who carried him about in a hamper, and pressed the scientific to look in at the lid.

The sands of the hour had all run out when we got back to the Temeraire. Says Bullfinch, then, to the youth in livery, with boldness, "Lavatory!"

When we arrived at the family vault with a sky-light, which the youth in livery presented as the institution sought, we had already whisked off our cravats and coats; but, finding ourselves in the presence of an evil smell, and no linen but two crumpled towels newly damp from the countenances of two somebody elses, we put on our cravats and coats again, and fled unwashed to the coffee-room.

There the waiter who ought to wait upon us had set forth our knives and forks and glasses, on the cloth whose dirty acquaintance we had already had the pleasure of making, and which we were pleased to recognise by the familiar expression of its stains. And now there occurred the truly surprising phenomenon, that the waiter who ought not to wait upon us swooped down upon us, clutched our loaf of bread, and vanished with the same.

Bullfinch, with distracted eyes, was following this unaccountable figure "out at the portal," like the ghost in Hamlet, when the waiter who ought to wait upon us jostled against it, carrying a tureen.

"Waiter!" said a severe diner, lately finished, perusing his bill fiercely through his eye-glass.

The waiter put down our tureen on a remote

side-table, and went to see what was amiss in this new direction.

"This is not right, you know, waiter. Look here! Here's yesterday's sherry, one-and-eightpence, and here we are again two shillings. And what does sixpence mean?"

So far from knowing what sixpence meant, the waiter protested that he didn't know what anything meant. He wiped the perspiration from his clammy brow, and said it was impossible to do it,—not particularising what,—and the kitchen was so far off.

"Take the bill to the bar and get it altered," said Mr. Indignation Cocker, so to call him.

The waiter took it, looked intensely at it, didn't seem to like the idea of taking it to the bar, and submitted, as a new light upon the case, that perhaps sixpence meant sixpence.

"I tell you again," said Mr. Indignation Cocker, "here's yesterday's sherry—can't you see it?—one-and-eightpence, and here we are again two shillings. What do you make of one-and-eightpence and two shillings?"

Totally unable to make anything of one-and-eightpence and two shillings, the waiter went out to try if anybody else could; merely casting a helpless backward glance at Bullfinch, in acknowledgment of his pathetic entreaties for our soup-tureen. After a pause, during which Mr. Indignation Cocker read a newspaper and coughed defiant coughs, Bullfinch arose to get the tureen, when the waiter reappeared and brought it,—dropping Mr. Indignation Cocker's altered bill on Mr. Indignation Cocker's table as he came along.

"It's quite impossible to do it, gentlemen," murmured the waiter; "and the kitchen is so far off."

"Well, you don't keep the house; it's not your fault, we suppose. Bring some sherry."

"Waiter!" from Mr. Indignation Cocker, with a new and burning sense of injury upon him.

The waiter, arrested on his way to our sherry, stopped short, and came back to see what was wrong now.

"Will you look here? This is worse than before. Do you understand? Here's yesterday's sherry, one-and-eightpence, and here we are again two shillings. And what the devil does ninepence mean?"

This new portent utterly confounded the waiter. He wrung his napkin, and mutely appealed to the ceiling.

"Waiter, fetch that sherry," says Bullfinch in open wrath and revolt.

"I want to know," persisted Mr. Indignation

Cocker, "the meaning of ninepence." I want to know the meaning of sherry one-and-eightpence yesterday, and of here we are again two shillings. Send somebody."

The distracted waiter got out of the room on pretext of sending somebody, and by that means got our wine. But, the instant he appeared with our decanter, Mr. Indignation Cocker descended on him again.

"Waiter!"

"You will now have the goodness to attend to our dinner, waiter," said Bullfinch sternly.

"I am very sorry, but it's quite impossible to do it, gentlemen," pleaded the waiter; "and the kitchen——"

"Waiter!" said Mr. Indignation Cocker.

"—Is," resumed the waiter, "so far off, that——"

"Waiter!" persisted Mr. Indignation Cocker, "send somebody."

We were not without our fears that the waiter rushed out to hang himself; and we were much relieved by his fetching somebody,—in graceful, flowing skirts, and with a waist,—who very soon settled Mr. Indignation Cocker's business.

"Oh!" said Mr. Cocker, with his fire surprisingly quenched by this apparition; "I wished to ask about this bill of mine, because it appears to me that there's a little mistake here. Let me show you. Here's yesterday's sherry one-and-eightpence, and here we are again two shillings. And how do you explain ninepence?"

However, it was explained, in tones too soft to be overheard. Mr. Cocker was heard to say nothing more than "Ah-h-h! Indeed; thank you! Yes," and shortly afterwards went out, a milder man.

The lone traveller with the stomachache had all this time suffered severely, drawing up a leg now and then, and sipping hot brandy-and-water with grated ginger in it. When we tasted our (very) mock-turtle soup, and were instantly seized with symptoms of some disorder simulating apoplexy, and occasioned by the surcharge of nose and brain with lukewarm dish-water holding in solution sour flour, poisonous condiments, and (say) seventy-five per cent. of miscellaneous kitchen-stuff rolled into balls, we were inclined to trace his disorder to that source. On the other hand, there was a silent anguish upon him too strongly resembling the results established within ourselves by the sherry, to be discarded from alarmed consideration. Again, we observed him, with terror, to be much overcome by our sole's being aired in a temporary retreat close to him, while the waiter went out (as we conceived) to see his friends. And, when

the curry made its appearance, he suddenly retired in great disorder.

In fine, for the uncatable part of this little dinner (as contradistinguished from the undrinkable) we paid only seven shillings and sixpence each. And Bullfinch and I agreed unanimously that no such ill-served, ill-appointed, ill-cooked, nasty little dinner could be got for the money anywhere else under the sun. With that comfort to our backs, we turned them on the dear old Temeraire, the charging Temeraire, and resolved (in the Scotch dialect) to gang nae mair to the flabby Temeraire.

XXXIII.

MR. BARLOW.



GREAT reader of good fiction at an unusually early age, it seems to me as though I had been born under the superintendence of the estimable but terrific gentleman whose name stands at the head of my present reflections. The instructive monomaniac, Mr. Barlow, will be remembered as the tutor of Master Harry Sandford and Master Tommy Merton. He knew everything, and didactically improved all sorts of occasions, from the consumption of a plate of cherries to the contemplation of a starlight night. What youth came to without Mr. Barlow was displayed in the history of Sandford and Merton, by the example of a certain awful Master Mash. This young wretch wore buckles and powder, conducted himself with insupportable levity at the theatre, had no idea of facing a mad bull single-handed (in which I think him less reprehensible, as remotely reflecting my own character), and was a frightful instance of the enervating effects of luxury upon the human race.

Strange destiny on the part of Mr. Barlow, to go down to posterity as childhood's experience of a bore! Immortal Mr. Barlow, boring his way through the verdant freshness of ages!

My personal indictment against Mr. Barlow is one of many counts. I will proceed to set forth a few of the injuries he has done me.

In the first place, he never made or took a joke. This insensibility on Mr. Barlow's part not only cast its own gloom over my boyhood, but blighted even the sixpenny jest books of the time; for groaning under a moral spell constraining me to refer all things to Mr. Barlow, I could not choose but ask myself in a whisper,

when tickled by a printed jest, "What would *he* think of it? What would *he* see in it?" The point of the jest immediately became a sting, and stung my conscience. For my mind's eye saw him stolid, frigid, perchance taking from its shelf some dreary Greek book, and translating at full length what some dismal sage said (and touched up afterwards, perhaps, for publication), when he banished some unlucky joker from Athens.

The incompatibility of Mr. Barlow with all other portions of my young life but himself, the adamantine inadaptability of the man to my favourite fancies and amusements, is the thing for which I hate him most. What right had he to bore his way into my Arabian Nights? Yet he did. He was always hinting doubts of the veracity of Sinbad the Sailor. If he could have got hold of the Wonderful Lamp, I knew he would have trimmed it and lighted it, and delivered a lecture over it on the qualities of sperm oil, with a glance at the whale fisheries. He would soon have found out—on mechanical principles—the peg in the neck of the Enchanted Horse, and would have turned it the right way in so workmanlike a manner, that the horse could never have got any height into the air, and the story couldn't have been. He would have proved, by map and compass, that there was no such kingdom as the delightful kingdom of Casgar, on the frontiers of Tartary. He would have caused that hypocritical young prig Harry to make an experiment,—with the aid of a temporary building in the garden and a dummy,—demonstrating that you couldn't let a choked hunchback down an Eastern chimney with a cord, and leave him upright on the hearth to terrify the sultan's purveyor.

The golden sounds of the overture to the first metropolitan pantomime, I remember, were alloyed by Mr. Barlow. Click click, ting ting, bang bang, weedle weedle weedle, bang! I recall the chilling air that ran across my frame and cooled my hot delight as the thought occurred to me, "This would never do for Mr. Barlow!" After the curtain drew up, dreadful doubts of Mr. Barlow's considering the costumes of the Nymphs of the Nebula as being sufficiently opaque obtruded themselves on my enjoyment. In the clown I perceived two persons; one a fascinating unaccountable creature of a hectic complexion, joyous in spirits, though feeble in intellect, with flashes of brilliancy; the other a pupil for Mr. Barlow. I thought how Mr. Barlow would secretly rise early in the morning, and butter the pavement for *him*, and, when he had brought him down, would look

severely out of his study window, and ask *him* how he enjoyed the fun.

I thought how Mr. Barlow would heat all the pokers in the house, and singe him with the whole collection, to bring him better acquainted with the properties of incandescent iron, on which he (Barlow) would fully expatiate. I pictured Mr. Barlow's instituting a comparison between the clown's conduct at his studies,—drinking up the ink, licking his copy-book, and using his head for blotting-paper,—and that of the already-mentioned young prig of prigs, Harry, sitting at the Barlovian feet, sneakily pretending to be in a rapture of youthful knowledge. I thought how soon Mr. Barlow would smooth the clown's hair down, instead of letting it stand erect in three tall tufts; and how, after a couple of years or so with Mr. Barlow, he would keep his legs close together when he walked, and would take his hands out of his big loose pockets, and wouldn't have a jump left in him.

That I am particularly ignorant what most things in the universe are made of, and how they are made, is another of my charges against Mr. Barlow. With the dread upon me of developing into a Harry, and with a further dread upon me of being Barlowed if I made inquiries, by bringing down upon myself a cold shower-bath of explanations and experiments, I forbore enlightenment in my youth, and became, as they say in melodramas, "the wreck you now behold." That I consorted with idlers and dunces is another of the melancholy facts for which I hold Mr. Barlow responsible. That pragmatical prig, Harry, became so detestable in my sight, that, he being reported studious in the South, I would have fled idle to the extreme North. Better to learn misconduct from a Master Mash than science and statistics from a Sandford! So I took the path which, but for Mr. Barlow, I might never have trodden. Thought I, with a shudder, "Mr. Barlow is a bore, with an immense constructive power of making bores. His prize specimen is a bore. He seeks to make a bore of me. That knowledge is power I am not prepared to gainsay; but, with Mr. Barlow, knowledge is power to bore." Therefore I took refuge in the caves of ignorance, wherein I have resided ever since, and which are still my private address.

But the weightiest charge of all my charges against Mr. Barlow is, that he still walks the earth in various disguises, seeking to make a Tommy of me, even in my maturity. Irrepressible, instructive monomaniac, Mr. Barlow fills my life with pitfalls, and lies hiding at the

bottom to burst out upon me when I least expect him.

A few of these dismal experiences of mine shall suffice.

Knowing Mr. Barlow to have invested largely in the moving-panorama trade, and having on various occasions identified him in the dark with a long wand in his hand, holding forth in his old way (made more appalling in this connection by his sometimes cracking a piece of Mr. Carlyle's own Dead-Sea fruit in mistake for a joke), I systematically shun pictorial entertainment on rollers. Similarly, I should demand responsible bail and guaranty against the appearance of Mr. Barlow, before committing myself to attendance at any assemblage of my fellow-creatures where a bottle of water and a note-book were conspicuous objects; for, in either of those associations, I should expressly expect him. But such is the designing nature of the man, that he steals in where no reasoning precaution or prevision could expect him. As in the following case:—

Adjoining the Caves of Ignorance is a country town. In this country town the Mississippi Momuses, nine in number, were announced to appear in the Town-hall, for the general delectation, this last Christmas week. Knowing Mr. Barlow to be unconnected with the Mississippi, though holding republican opinions, and deeming myself secure, I took a stall. My object was to hear and see the Mississippi Momuses in what the bills described as their "National ballads, plantation break-downs, nigger part songs, choice conundrums, sparkling repartees, &c." I found the nine dressed alike, in the black coat and trousers, white waistcoat, very large shirt-front, very large shirt collar, and very large white tie and wristbands, which constitute the dress of the mass of the African race, and which has been observed by travellers to prevail over a vast number of degrees of latitude. All the nine rolled their eyes exceedingly, and had very red lips. At the extremities of the curve they formed, seated in their chairs, were the performers on the tambourine and bones. The centre Momus, a black of melancholy aspect (who inspired me with a vague uneasiness for which I could not then account), performed on a Mississippi instrument closely resembling what was once called in this island a hurdy-gurdy. The Momuses on either side of him had each another instrument peculiar to the Father of Waters, which may be likened to a stringed weather-glass held upside down. There were likewise a little flute and a violin. All went well for awhile, and we had had several spark-

ling repartees exchanged between the performers on the tambourine and bones, when the slack of melancholy aspect, turning to the latter, and addressing him in a deep and improving voice as "Bones, sir," delivered certain grave remarks to him concerning the juveniles present, and the season of the year; whereon I perceived that I was in the presence of Mr. Barlow, corked!

Another night—and this was in London—I attended the representation of a little comedy. As the characters were lifelike (and consequently not improving), and as they went upon their several ways and designs without personally addressing themselves to me, I felt rather confident of coming through it without being regarded as Tommy, the more so as we were clearly getting close to the end. But I deceived myself. All of a sudden, and apropos of nothing, everybody concerned came to a check and halt—advanced to the foot-lights in a general rally to take dead aim at me, and brought me down with a moral homily, in which I detected the dread hand of Barlow.

Nay, so intricate and subtle are the toils of this hunter, that, on the very next night after that, I was again entrapped, where no vestige of a spring could have been apprehended by the timidiest. It was a burlesque that I saw performed; an uncompromising burlesque, where everybody concerned, but especially the ladies, carried on at a very considerable rate indeed. Most prominent and active among the corps of performers was what I took to be (and she really gave me very fair opportunities of coming to a right conclusion) a young lady of a pretty figure. She was dressed as a picturesque young gentleman, whose pantaloons had been cut off in their infancy; and she had very neat knees and very neat satin boots. Immediately after singing a slang song and dancing a slang dance, this engaging figure approached the fatal lamps, and, bending over them, delivered in a thrilling voice a random eulogium on, and exhortation to pursue, the virtues. "Great Heaven!" was my exclamation; "Barlow!"

There is still another aspect in which Mr. Barlow perpetually insists on my sustaining the character of Tommy, which is more unendurable yet, on account of its extreme aggressiveness. For the purposes of a review or newspaper, he will get up an abstruse subject with infinite pains, will Barlow, utterly regardless of the price, of midnight oil, and, indeed, of everything else, save cramming himself to the eyes.

But mark. When Mr. Barlow blows his

information off, he is not contented with having rammed it home, and discharged it upon me, Tommy, his target, but he pretends that he was always in possession of it, and made nothing of it,—that he imbibed it with mother's milk,—and that I, the wretched Tommy, am most abjectly behindhand in not having done the same. I ask, Why is Tommy to be always the foil of Mr. Barlow to this extent? What Mr. Barlow had not the slightest notion of himself a week ago, it surely cannot be any very heavy backsliding in me not to have at my fingers' ends to-day! And yet Mr. Barlow systematically carries it over me with a high hand, and will tauntingly ask me, in his articles, whether it is possible that I am not aware that every school-boy knows that the fourteenth turning on the left in the steppes of Russia will conduct to such and such a wandering tribe? with other disparaging questions of like nature. So, when Mr. Barlow addresses a letter to any journal as a volunteer correspondent (which I frequently find him doing), he will previously have gotten somebody to tell him some tremendous technicality, and will write in the coolest manner, "Now, sir, I may assume that every reader of your columns, possessing average information and intelligence, knows as well as I do that"—say that the draught from the touch-hole of a cannon of such a calibre bears such a proportion in the nicest fractions to the draught from the muzzle; or some equally familiar little fact. But, whatever it is, be certain that it always tends to the exaltation of Mr. Barlow, and the depression of his enforced and enslaved pupil.

Mr. Barlow's knowledge of my own pursuits I find to be so profound, that my own knowledge of them becomes as nothing. Mr. Barlow (disguised and bearing a feigned name, but detected by me) has occasionally taught me, in a sonorous voice, from end to end of a long dinner-table, trifles that I took the liberty of teaching him five-and-twenty years ago. My closing article of impeachment against Mr. Barlow is, that he goes out to breakfast, goes out to dinner, goes out everywhere, high and low, and that he will preach to me, and that I CAN'T get rid of him. He makes of me a Promethean Tommy, bound; and he is the vulture that gorges itself upon the liver of my uninstructed mind.

XXXIV.

ON AN AMATEUR BEAT.

IT is one of my fancies, that even my idlest walk must always have its appointed destination. I set myself a task before I leave my lodging in Covent Garden on a street expedition, and should no more think of altering my route by the way, or turning back and leaving a part of it unachieved, than I should think of fraudulently violating an agreement entered into with somebody else. The other day, finding myself under this kind of obligation to proceed to Limehouse, I started punctually at noon, in compliance with the terms of the contract with myself to which my good faith was pledged.

On such an occasion it is my habit to regard my walk as my beat, and myself as a higher sort of police-constable doing duty on the same. There is many a ruffian in the streets whom I mentally collar and clear out of them, who would see mighty little of London, I can tell him, if I could deal with him physically.

Issuing forth upon this very beat, and following with my eyes three hulking garroters on their way home,—which home I could confidently swear to be within so many yards of Drury Lane, in such a narrow and restricted direction (though they live in their lodging quite as undisturbed as I in mine),—I went on duty with a consideration which I respectfully offer to the new Chief Commissioner,—in whom I thoroughly confide as a tried and efficient public servant. How often (thought I) have I been forced to swallow, in police reports, the intolerable stereotyped pill of nonsense, how that the police-constable informed the worthy magistrate how that the associates of the prisoner did, at that present speaking, dwell in a street or court which no man dared go down, and how that the worthy magistrate had heard of the dark reputation of such street or court, and how that our readers would doubtless remember that it was always the same street or court which was thus edifyingly discoursed about, say, once a fortnight.

Now, suppose that a Chief Commissioner sent round a circular to every division of police employed in London, requiring instantly the names in all districts of all such much-puffed streets or courts which no man durst go down; and suppose that in such circular he gave plain warning, "If those places really exist, they are a proof of police inefficiency which I mean to punish;

and if they do not exist, but are a conventional fiction, then they are a proof of lazy tacit police connivance with professional crime, which I also mean to punish"—what then? Fictions or realities, could they survive the touchstone of this atom of common sense? To tell us in open court, until it has become as trite a feature of news as the great gooseberry, that a costly police system, such as was never before heard of, has left in London, in the days of steam and gas and photographs of thieves and electric telegraphs, the sanctuaries and stews of the Stuarts! Why, a parity of practice, in all departments, would bring back the Plague in two summers, and the Druids in a century!

Walking faster under my share of this public injury, I overturned a wretched little creature, who, clutching at the rags of a pair of trousers with one of its claws, and at its ragged hair with the other, pattered with bare feet over the muddy stones. I stopped to raise and succour this poor weeping wretch, and fifty like it, but of both sexes, were about me in a moment, begging, tumbling, fighting, clamouring, yelling, shivering in their nakedness and hunger. The piece of money I had put into the claw of the child I had overturned was clawed out of it, and was again clawed out of that wolfish gripe, and again out of that, and soon I had no notion in what part of the obscene scuffle in the mud, of rags and legs, and arms and dirt, the money might be. In raising the child, I had drawn it aside out of the main thoroughfare, and this took place among some wooden hoardings and barriers and ruins of demolished buildings hard by Temple Bar.

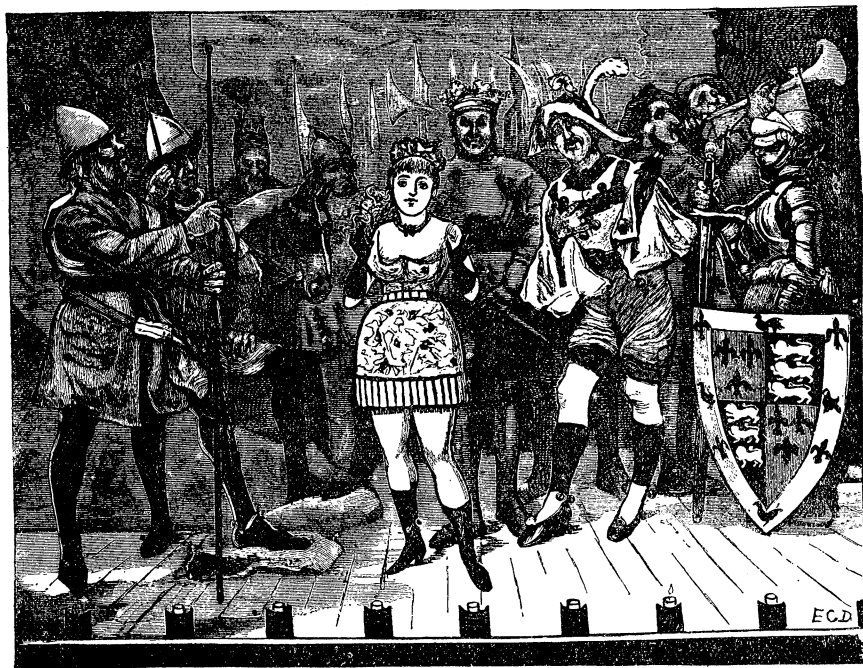
Unexpectedly, from among them emerged a genuine police-constable, before whom the dreadful brood dispersed in various directions, he making feints and darts in this direction and in that, and catching nothing. When all were frightened away he took off his hat, pulled out a handkerchief from it, wiped his heated brow, and restored the handkerchief and hat to their places, with the air of a man who had discharged a great moral duty,—as indeed he had, in doing what was set down for him. I looked at him, and I looked about at the disorderly traces in the mud, and I thought of the drops of rain and the footprints of an extinct creature, hoary ages upon ages old, that geologists have identified on the face of a cliff; and this speculation came over me: If this mud could petrify at this moment, and could lie concealed here for ten thousand years, I wonder whether the race of men then to be our successors on the earth could, from these or any marks, by the utmost

force of the human intellect, unassisted by tradition, deduce such an astounding inference as the existence of a polished state of society that bore with the public savagery of neglected children in the streets of its capital city, and was proud of its power by sea and land, and never used its power to seize and save them!

After this, when I came to the Old Bailey, and glanced up it towards Newgate, I found that the prison had an inconsistent look. There seemed to be some unlucky inconsistency in the

atmosphere that day; for, though the proportions of St. Paul's Cathedral are very beautiful, it had an air of being somewhat out of drawing in my eyes. I felt as though the cross were too high up, and perched upon the intervening golden ball too far away.

Facing eastward, I left behind me Smithfield and Old Bailey,—fire and faggot, condemned hold, public hanging, whipping through the city at the cart-tail, pillory, branding-iron, and other beautiful ancestral landmarks, which rude hands



"THIS ENGAGING FIGURE APPROACHED THE FATAL LAMPS."

have rooted up, without bringing the stars quite down upon us as yet,—and went my way upon my beat, noting how oddly characteristic neighbourhoods are divided from one another here-about, as though by an invisible line across the way. Here shall cease the bankers and the money-changers; here shall begin the shipping interest, and the nautical-instrument shops; here shall follow a scarcely perceptible flavouring of groceries and drugs; here shall come a strong infusion of butchers; now, small hosiers shall

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be in the ascendant; henceforth, everything exposed for sale shall have its ticketed price attached. All this as if specially ordered and appointed.

A single stride at Houndsditch Church, no wider than sufficed to cross the kennel at the bottom of the Canonate, which the debtors in Holyrood sanctuary were wont to relieve their minds by skipping over, as Scott relates, and standing in delightful daring of catchpoles on the free side,—a single stride, and everything is

entirely changed in grain and character. West of the stride, a table, or a chest of drawers on sale, shall be of mahogany and French-polished; east of the stride, it shall be of deal, smeared with a cheap counterfeit resembling lip-salve. West of the stride, a penny loaf or bun shall be compact and self-contained; east of the stride, it shall be of a sprawling and splay-footed character, as seeking to make more of itself for the money. My beat lying round by Whitechapel Church, and the adjacent sugar refineries,—great buildings, tier upon tier, that have the appearance of being nearly related to the dock warehouses at Liverpool,—I turned off to my right, and, passing round the awkward corner on my left, came suddenly on an apparition familiar to London streets afar off.

What London peripatetic of these times has not seen the woman who has fallen forward, double, through some affection of the spine, and whose head has of late taken a turn to one side, so that it now droops over the back of one of her arms at about the wrist? Who does not know her staff, and her shawl, and her basket, as she gropes her way along, capable of seeing nothing but the pavement, never begging, never stopping, for ever going somewhere on no business? How does she live, whence does she come, whither does she go, and why? I mind the time when her yellow arms were nought but bone and parchment. Slight changes steal over her; for there is a shadowy suggestion of human skin on them now. The Strand may be taken as the central point about which she revolves in a half-mile orbit. How comes she so far east as this? And coming back, too! Having been how much farther? She is a rare spectacle in this neighbourhood. I receive intelligent information to this effect from a dog,—a lop-sided mongrel with a foolish tail, plodding along with his tail up, and his ears pricked, and displaying an amiable interest in the ways of his fellow-men,—if I may be allowed the expression. After pausing at a pork shop, he is jogging eastward like myself, with a benevolent countenance and a watery mouth, as though musing on the many excellences of pork, when he beholds this doubled-up bundle approaching. He is not so much astonished at the bundle (though amazed by that), as the circumstance that it has within itself the means of locomotion. He stops, pricks his ears higher, makes a slight point, stares, utters a short low growl, and glistens at the nose,—as I conceive with terror. The bundle continuing to approach, he barks, turns tail, and is about to fly, when, arguing with himself that flight is not becoming in a dog, he turns, and once more

faces the advancing heap of clothes. After much hesitation, it occurs to him that there may be a face in it somewhere. Desperately resolving to undertake the adventure, and pursue the inquiry, he goes slowly up to the bundle, goes slowly round it, and, coming at length upon the human countenance, there where never human countenance could be, he gives a yelp of horror, and hurries for the East India Docks.

Being now in the Commercial-Road district of my beat, and bethinking myself that Stepney station is near, I quicken my pace that I may turn out of the road at that point, and see how my small eastern star is shining.

The Children's Hospital, to which I gave that name, is in full force. All its beds are occupied. There is a new face on the bed where my pretty baby lay, and that sweet little child is now at rest for ever. Much kind sympathy has been here since my former visit, and it is good to see the walls profusely garnished with dolls. I wonder what Poodles may think of them, as they stretch out their arms above the beds, and stare, and display their splendid dresses. Poodles has a greater interest in the patients. I find him making the round of the beds, like a house surgeon, attended by another dog,—a friend,—who appears to trot about with him in the character of his pupil dresser. Poodles is anxious to make me known to a pretty little girl looking wonderfully healthy, who had had a leg taken off for cancer of the knee. A difficult operation, Poodles intimates, wagging his tail on the counterpane, but perfectly successful, as you see, dear sir! The patient, patting Poodles, adds with a smile, "The leg was so much trouble to me, that I am glad it's gone." I never saw anything in doggery finer than the deportment of Poodles, when another little girl opens her mouth to show a peculiar enlargement of the tongue. Poodles (at that time on a table, to be on a level with the occasion) looks at the tongue (with his own sympathetically out) so very gravely and knowingly, that I feel inclined to put my hand in my waistcoat pocket, and give him a guinea, wrapped in paper.

On my beat again, and close to Limehouse Church, its termination, I found myself near to certain "Lead Mills." Struck by the name, which was fresh in my memory, and finding, on inquiry, that these same lead-mills were identified with those same lead-mills of which I made mention when I first visited the East London Children's Hospital and its neighbourhood as Uncommercial Traveller, I resolved to have a look at them.

Received by two very intelligent gentlemen,

brothers, and partners with their father in the concern, and who testified every desire to show their works to me freely, I went over the lead-mills. The purport of such works is the conversion of pig-lead into white-lead. This conversion is brought about by the slow and gradual effecting of certain successive technical changes in the lead itself. The process is picturesque and interesting,—the most so being the burying of the lead, at a certain stage of preparation, in pots, each pot containing a certain quantity of acid besides, and all the pots being buried in vast numbers, in layers, under tan, for some ten weeks.

Hopping up ladders, and across planks, and on elevated perches, until I was uncertain whether to liken myself to a bird or a brick-layer, I became conscious of standing on nothing particular, looking down into one of a series of large cock-lofts, with the outer day peeping in through the chinks in the tiled roof above. A number of women were ascending to, and descending from, this cock-loft, each carrying on the upward journey a pot of prepared lead and acid, for deposition under the smoking tan. When one layer of pots was completely filled, it was carefully covered in with planks, and those were carefully covered with tan again, and then another layer of pots was begun above; sufficient means of ventilation being preserved through wooden tubes. Going down into the cock-loft then filling, I found the heat of the tan to be surprisingly great, and also the odour of the lead and acid to be not absolutely exquisite, though I believe not noxious at that stage. In other cock-lofts, where the pots were being exhumed, the heat of the steaming tan was much greater, and the smell was penetrating and peculiar. There were cock-lofts in all stages; full and empty, half filled and half emptied; strong, active women were clambering about them busily; and the whole thing had rather the air of the upper part of the house of some immensely rich old Turk, whose faithful seraglio was hiding his money because the sultan or the pasha was coming.

As is the case with most pulps or pigments, so in the instance of this white-lead, processes of stirring, separating, washing, grinding, rolling, and pressing succeed. Some of these are unquestionably inimical to health, the danger arising from inhalation of particles of lead, or from contact between the lead and the touch, or both. Against these dangers I found good respirators provided (simply made of flannel and muslin, so as to be inexpensively renewed, and in some instances washed with scented

soap), and gauntlet gloves, and loose gowns. Everywhere there was as much fresh air as windows, well placed and opened, could possibly admit. And it was explained that the precaution of frequently changing the women employed in the worst parts of the work (a precaution originating in their own experience or apprehension of its ill effects) was found salutary. They had a mysterious and singular appearance, with the mouth and nose covered, and the loose gown on, and yet bore out the simile of the old Turk and the seraglio all the better for the disguise.

At last this vexed white-lead, having been buried and resuscitated, and heated and cooled and stirred, and separated and washed and ground, and rolled and pressed, is subjected to the action of intense fiery heat. A row of women, dressed as above described, stood, let us say, in a large stone bakehouse, passing on the baking-dishes as they were given out by the cooks, from hand to hand, into the ovens. The oven, or stove, cold as yet, looked as high as an ordinary house, and was full of men and women on temporary footholds, briskly passing up and stowing away the dishes. The door of another oven, or stove, about to be cooled and emptied, was opened from above, for the uncommercial countenance to peer down into. The uncommercial countenance withdrew itself with expedition and a sense of suffocation from the dull-glowing heat and the overpowering smell. Or the whole, perhaps the going into these stoves to work, when they are freshly opened, may be the worst part of the occupation.

But I made it out to be indubitable that the owners of these lead-mills honestly and sedulously try to reduce the dangers of the occupation to the lowest point.

A washing-place is provided for the women (I thought there might have been more towels), and a room in which they hang their clothes, and take their meals, and where they have a good fire-range and fire, and a female attendant to help them, and to watch that they do not neglect the cleansing of their hands before touching their food. An experienced medical attendant is provided for them, and any premonitory symptoms of lead-poisoning are carefully treated. Their teapots and such things were set out on tables, ready for their afternoon meal, when I saw their room; and it had a homely look. It is found that they bear the work much better than men: some few of them have been at it for years, and the great majority of those I observed were strong and active. On the other hand, it should be remembered that


most of them are very capricious and irregular in their attendance.

American inventiveness would seem to indicate that before very long white-lead may be made entirely by machinery. The sooner the better. In the meantime, I parted from my two frank conductors over the mills, by telling them that they had nothing there to be concealed, and nothing to be blamed for. As to the rest, the philosophy of the matter of lead-poisoning and workpeople seems to me to have been pretty fairly summed up by the Irishwoman whom I quoted in my former paper: "Some of them gets lead-pisoned soon, and some of them gets lead-pisoned later, and some, but not many, niver; and 'tis all according to the constitoo-shun, sur; and some constitoo-shuns is strong, and some is weak."

Retracing my footsteps over my beat, I went off dutv.

XXXV.

A PLEA FOR TOTAL ABSTINENCE.

NE day this last Whitsuntide, at precisely eleven o'clock in the forenoon, there suddenly rode into the field of view commanded by the windows of my lodging an equestrian phenomenon. It was a fellow-creature on horseback, dressed in the absurdest manner. The fellow-creature wore high boots; some other (and much larger) fellow-creature's breeches, of a slack-baked doughy colour and a baggy form; a blue shirt, whereof the skirt, or tail, was puffily tucked into the waistband of the said breeches; no coat; a red shoulder-belt; and a demi-semi-military scarlet hat, with a feathered ornament in front, which, to the uninstructed human vision, had the appearance of a moulting shuttlecock. I laid down the newspaper with which I had been occupied, and surveyed the fellow-man in question with astonishment. Whether he had been sitting to any painter as a frontispiece for a new edition of "Sartor Resartus;" whether "the husk or shell of him," as the esteemed Herr Teufelsdröckh might put it, were founded on a jockey, on a circus, on General Garibaldi, on cheap porcelain, on a toy-shop, on Guy Fawkes, on wax-work, on gold-digging, on Bedlam; or on all,—were doubts that greatly exercised my mind. Meanwhile, my fellow-man stumbled and slid, excessively against his will, on the

slippery stones of my Covent-Garden street, and elicited shrieks from several sympathetic females, by convulsively restraining himself from pitching over his horse's head. In the very crisis of these evolutions, and, indeed, at the trying moment when his charger's tail was in a tobacconist's shop and his head anywhere about town, this cavalier was joined by two similar portents, who likewise stumbling and sliding, caused him to stumble and slide the more distressingly. At length this Gilpinian triumvirate effected a halt, and, looking northward, waved their three right hands as commanding unseen troops to "Up, guards! and at 'em." Hereupon a brazen band burst forth, which caused them to be instantly bolted with to some remote spot of earth in the direction of the Surrey Hills.

Judging from these appearances that a procession was under way, I threw up my window, and, craning out, had the satisfaction of beholding it advancing along the streets. It was a Teetotal procession, as I learnt from its banners, and was long enough to consume twenty minutes in passing. There were a great number of children in it, some of them so very young in their mother's arms as to be in the act of practically exemplifying their abstinence from fermented liquors, and attachment to an unintoxicating drink, while the procession defiled. The display was, on the whole, pleasant to see, as any good-humoured holiday assemblage of clean, cheerful, and well-conducted people should be. It was bright with ribbons, tinsel, and shoulder-belts, and abounded in flowers, as if those latter trophies had come up in profusion under much watering. The day being breezy, the insubordination of the large banners was very reprehensible. Each of these being borne aloft on two poles, and stayed with some half-dozen lines, was carried, as polite books in the last century used to be written, by "various hands," and the anxiety expressed in the upturned faces of those officers,—something between the anxiety attendant on the balancing art, and that inseparable from the pastime of kite-flying, with a touch of the angler's quality in landing his scaly prey,—much impressed me. Suddenly, too, a banner would shiver in the wind, and go about in the most inconvenient manner. This always happened oftenest with such gorgeous standards as those representing a gentleman in black, corpulent with tea and water, in the laudable act of summarily reforming a family, feeble and pinched with beer. The gentleman in black distended by wind would then conduct himself with the most unbecoming levity, while the beery family,

growing beerier, would frantically try to tear themselves away from his ministration. Some of the inscriptions accompanying the banners were of a highly determined character, as, "We never, never will give up the temperance cause," with similar sound resolutions rather suggestive to the profane mind of Mrs. Micawber's "I never will desert Mr. Micawber," and of Mr. Micawber's retort, "Really, my dear, I am not aware that you were ever required by any human being to do anything of the sort."

At intervals a gloom would fall on the passing members of the procession, for which I was at first unable to account. But this I discovered, after a little observation, to be occasioned by the coming on of the executioners,—the terrible official beings who were to make the speeches by-and-by,—who were distributed in open carriages at various points of the cavalcade. A dark cloud and a sensation of dampness, as from many wet blankets, invariably preceded the rolling on of the dreadful cars containing these headsmen; and I noticed that the wretched people who closely followed them, and who were in a manner forced to contemplate their folded arms, complacent countenances, and threatening lips, were more overshadowed by the cloud and damp than those in front. Indeed, I perceived in some of these so moody an implacability towards the magnates of the scaffold, and so plain a desire to tear them limb from limb, that I would respectfully suggest to the managers the expediency of conveying the executioners to the scene of their dismal labours by unfrequented ways, and in closely-tilted carts, next Whitsuntide.

The procession was composed of a series of smaller processions, which had come together, each from its own metropolitan district. An infusion of allegory became perceptible when patriotic Peckham advanced. So I judged from the circumstance of Peckham's unfurling a silken banner that fanned heaven and earth with the words, "The Peckham Life-boat." No boat being in attendance, though life, in the likeness of "a gallant, gallant crew," in nautical uniform, followed the flag, I was led to meditate on the fact that Peckham is described by geographers as an inland settlement, with no larger or nearer shore-line than the towing-path of the Surrey Canal, on which stormy station I had been given to understand no life-boat exists. Thus I deduced an allegorical meaning, and came to the conclusion, that if patriotic Peckham picked a peck of pickled poetry, this *was* the peck of pickled poetry which patriotic Peckham picked.

I have observed that the aggregate procession was, on the whole, pleasant to see. I made use of that qualified expression with a direct meaning, which I will now explain. It involves the title of this paper, and a little fair trying of teetotalism by its own tests. There were many people on foot, and many people in vehicles of various kinds. The former were pleasant to see, and the latter were not pleasant to see; for the reason that I never, on any occasion or under any circumstances, have beheld heavier overloading of horses than in this public show. Unless the imposition of a great van laden with from ten to twenty people on a single horse be a moderate tasking of the poor creature, then the temperate use of horses was immoderate and cruel. From the smallest and lightest horse to the largest and heaviest, there were many instances in which the beast of burden was so shamefully overladen, that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have frequently interposed in less gross cases.

Now, I have always held that there may be, and that there unquestionably is, such a thing as use without abuse, and that therefore the total abolitionists are irrational and wrong-headed. But the procession completely converted me. For so large a number of the people using draught-horses in it were so clearly unable to use them without abusing them, that I perceived total abstinence from horse-flesh to be the only remedy of which the case admitted. As it is all one to teetotalers whether you take half a pint of beer or half a gallon, so it was all one here whether the beast of burden were a pony or a cart-horse. Indeed, my case had the special strength that the half-pint quadruped underwent as much suffering as the half-gallon quadruped. Moral: total abstinence from horse-flesh through the whole length and breadth of the scale. This pledge will be in course of administration to all teetotal processionists, not pedestrians, at the publishing office of "All the Year Round," on the 1st day of April, 1870.

Observe a point for consideration. This procession comprised many persons in their gigs, broughams, tax-carts, barouches, chaises, and what not, who were merciful to the dumb beasts that drew them, and did not overcharge their strength. What is to be done with those unoffending persons? I will not run amuck, and vilify and defame them, as teetotal tracts and platforms would most assuredly do, if the question were one of drinking instead of driving: I merely ask, what is to be done with them? The reply admits of no dispute whatever. Manifestly, in strict accordance with teetotal doctrines, THEY

must come in too, and take the total abstinence from horse-flesh pledge. It is not pretended that those members of the procession misused certain auxiliaries which in most countries and all ages have been bestowed upon man for his use, but it is undeniable that other members of the procession did. Teetotal mathematics demonstrate that the less includes the greater; that the guilty include the innocent, the blind the seeing, the deaf the hearing, the dumb the speaking, the drunken the sober. If any of the moderate users of draught-cattle in question should deem that there is any gentle violence done to their reason by these elements of logic, they are invited to come out of the procession next Whitsuntide, and look at it from my window.

XXXVI.

THE RUFFIAN.



ENTERTAIN so strong an objection to the euphonious softening of Ruffian into Rough, which has lately become popular, that I restore the right word to the heading of this paper; the rather as my object is to dwell upon the fact that the Ruffian is tolerated among us to an extent that goes beyond all unruffianly endurance. I take the liberty to believe that if the Ruffian besets my life, a professional Ruffian at large in the open streets of a great city, notoriously having no other calling than that of Ruffian, and of disquieting and despoiling me as I go peacefully about my lawful business, interfering with no one, then the Government under which I have the great constitutional privilege, supreme honour and happiness, and all the rest of it, to exist, breaks down in the discharge of any Government's most simple elementary duty.

What did I read in the London daily papers in the early days of this last September? That the Police had "AT LENGTH SUCCEEDED IN CAPTURING TWO OF THE NOTORIOUS GANG THAT HAVE SO LONG INFESTED THE WATERLOO ROAD." Is it possible? What a wonderful Police! Here is a straight, broad, public thoroughfare of immense resort; half a mile long; gas-lighted by night; with a great gas-lighted railway station in it, extra the street lamps; full of shops; traversed by two popular cross-thoroughfares of considerable traffic; itself the main road to the South of London; and the admirable Police

have, after long infestment of this dark and lonely spot by a gang of Ruffians, actually got hold of two of them. Why, can it be doubted that any man of fair London knowledge and common resolution, armed with the powers of the Law, could have captured the whole confederacy in a week?

It is to the saving up of the Ruffian class by the Magistracy and Police—to the conventional preserving of them, as if they were Partridges—that their number and audacity must be in great part referred. Why is a notorious Thief and Ruffian ever left at large? He never turns his liberty to any account but violence and plunder, he never did a day's work out of gaol, he never will do a day's work out of gaol. As a proved notorious Thief, he is always consignable to prison for three months. When he comes out, he is surely as notorious a Thief as he was when he went in. Then send him back again. "Just Heaven!" cries the Society for the protection of remonstrant Ruffians. "This is equivalent to a sentence of perpetual imprisonment!" Precisely for that reason it has my advocacy. I demand to have the Ruffian kept out of my way, and out of the way of all decent people. I demand to have the Ruffian employed, perforce, in hewing wood and drawing water somewhere for the general service, instead of hewing at her Majesty's subjects, and drawing their watches out of their pockets. If this be termed an unreasonable demand, then the tax-gatherer's demand on me must be far more unreasonable, and cannot be otherwise than extortionate and unjust.

It will be seen that I treat of the Thief and Ruffian as one. I do so, because I know the two characters to be one, in the vast majority of cases, just as well as the Police know it. (As to the Magistracy, with a few exceptions, they know nothing about it but what the Police choose to tell them.) There are disorderly classes of men who are not thieves; as railway navigators, brickmakers, wood-sawyers, costermongers. These classes are often disorderly and troublesome; but it is mostly among themselves, and at any rate they have their industrious avocations, they work early and late, and work hard. The generic Ruffian—honourable member for what is tenderly called the Rough Element—is either a Thief, or the companion of Thieves. When he infamously molests women coming out of chapel on Sunday evenings (for which I would have his back scarified often and deep), it is not only for the gratification of his pleasant instincts, but that there may be a confusion raised by which either he or his friends may profit, in the commission of highway rob-

beries or in picking pockets. When he gets a police-constable down and kicks him helpless for life, it is because that constable once did his duty in bringing him to justice. When he rushes into the bar of a public-house, and scoops an eye out of one of the company there, or bites his ear off, it is because the man he maims gave evidence against him. When he and a line of comrades extending across the footway—say of that solitary mountain-spur of the Abruzzi, the Waterloo Road—advance towards me “sky-larking” among themselves, my purse or shirt-pin is in predestined peril from his playfulness. Always a Ruffian, always a Thief. Always a Thief, always a Ruffian.

Now, when I, who am not paid to know these things, know them daily on the evidence of my senses and experience; when I know that the Ruffian never jostles a lady in the street, or knocks a hat off, but in order that the Thief may profit, is it surprising that I should require, from those who *are* paid to know these things, prevention of them?

Look at this group at a street corner. Number One is a shirking fellow of five-and-twenty, in an ill-favoured and ill-savoured suit, his trousers of corduroy, his coat of some indiscernible ground-work for the deposition of grease, his neckerchief like an eel, his complexion like dirty dough, his mangy fur cap pulled low upon his beetle brows to hide the prison cut of his hair. His hands are in his pockets. He puts them there when they are idle, as naturally as in other people's pockets when they are busy, for he knows that they are not roughened by work, and that they tell a tale. Hence, whenever he takes one out to draw a sleeve across his nose—which is often, for he has weak eyes and a constitutional cold in his head—he restores it to its pocket immediately afterwards. Number Two is a burly brute of five-and-thirty, in a tall stiff hat; is a composite, as to his clothes, of betting-man and fighting-man; is whiskered; has a staring pin in his breast, along with his right hand; has insolent and cruel eyes; large shoulders; strong legs, booted and tipped for kicking. Number Three is forty years of age; is short, thick-set, strong, and bow-legged; wears knee cords and white stockings, a very long-sleeved waistcoat, a very large neckerchief doubled or trebled round his throat, and a crumpled white hat crowns his ghastly parchment face. This fellow looks like an executed postboy of other days, cut down from the gallows too soon, and restored and preserved by express diabolical agency. Numbers Five, Six, and Seven are hulking, idle, slouching young men,

patched and shabby, too short in the sleeves and too tight in the legs, slimly clothed, foul-spoken, repulsive wretches inside and out. In all the party there obtains a certain twitching character of mouth and furtiveness of eye, that hint how the coward is lurking under the bully. The hint is quite correct, for they are a slinking, sneaking set, far more prone to lie down on their backs and kick out, when in difficulty, than to make a stand for it. (This may account for the street mud on the backs of Numbers Five, Six, and Seven being much fresher than the stale splashes on their legs.)

These engaging gentry a Police-constable stands contemplating. His station, with a Reserve of assistance, is very near at hand. They cannot pretend to any trade, not even to be porters or messengers. It would be idle if they did, for he knows them, and they know that he knows them, to be nothing but professed Thieves and Ruffians. He knows where they resort, knows by what slang names they call one another, knows how often they have been in prison, and how long, and for what. All this is known at his Station, too, and is (or ought to be) known at Scotland Yard, too. But does he know, or does his Station know, or does Scotland Yard know, or does anybody know, why these fellows should be here at liberty, when, as reputed Thieves to whom a whole Division of Police could swear, they might all be under lock and key at hard labour? Not he; truly he would be a wise man if he did! He only knows that these are members of the “notorious gang,” which, according to the newspaper Police-Office reports of this last past September, “have so long infested” the awful solitudes of the Waterloo Road, and out of which almost impregnable fastnesses the Police have at length dragged Two, to the unspeakable admiration of all good civilians.

The consequences of this contemplative habit on the part of the Executive—a habit to be looked for in a hermit, but not in a Police System—are familiar to us all. The Ruffian becomes one of the established orders of the body politic. Under the playful name of Rough (as if he were merely a practical joker), his movements and successes are recorded on public occasions. Whether he mustered in large numbers or small; whether he was in good spirits or depressed; whether he turned his generous exertions to very prosperous account, or Fortune was against him; whether he was in a sanguinary mood, or robbed with amiable horse-play and a gracious consideration for life and limb; all this is chronicled as if he were an

Institution. Is there any city in Europe, out of England, in which these terms are held with the pests of Society? Or in which, at this day, such violent robberies from the person are constantly committed as in London?

The Preparatory Schools of Ruffianism are similarly borne with. The young Ruffians of London—not Thieves yet, but training for scholarships and fellowships in the Criminal-Court Universities—molest quiet people and their

property, to an extent that is hardly credible. The throwing of stones in the streets has become a dangerous and destructive offence, which surely could have got to no greater height, though we had had no Police but our own riding whips and walking-sticks—the Police to which I myself appeal on—these occasions. The throwing of stones at the windows of railway carriages in motion—an act of wanton wickedness with the very Arch-Fiend's hand in it—had become a



"LOOK AT THIS GROUP AT A STREET CORNER."

crying evil, when the railway companies forced it on Police notice. Constabular contemplation had until then been the order of the day.

Within these twelve months, there arose among the young gentlemen of London aspiring to Ruffianism, and cultivating that much-encouraged social art, a facetious cry of "I'll have this!" accompanied with a clutch at some article of a passing lady's dress. I have known a lady's veil to be thus humorously torn from her face and carried off in the open streets at

noon; and I have had the honour of myself giving chase, on Westminster Bridge, to another young Ruffian, who, in full daylight early on a summer evening, had nearly thrown a modest young woman into a swoon of indignation and confusion by his shameful manner of attacking her with this cry as she harmlessly passed along before me. MR. CARLYLE, some time since, awakened a little pleasantry by writing of his own experience of the Ruffian of the streets. I have seen the Ruffian act in exact accordance

with Mr. Carlyle's description, innumerable times, and I never saw him checked.

The blaring use of the very worst language possible, in our public thoroughfares—especially in those set apart for recreation—is another disgrace to us, and another result of constabular contemplation, the like of which I have never heard in any other country to which my uncommercial travels have extended. Years ago, when I had a near interest in certain children who were sent with their nurses, for air and exercise, into the Regent's Park, I found this evil to be so abhorrent and horrible there, that I called public attention to it, and also to its contemptible reception by the Police. Looking afterwards into the newest Police Act, and finding that the offence was punishable under it, I resolved, when striking occasion should arise, to try my hand as prosecutor. The occasion arose soon enough, and I ran the following gauntlet.

The utterer of the base coin in question was a girl of seventeen or eighteen, who, with a suitable attendance of blackguards, youths, and boys, was flaunting along the streets, returning from an Irish funeral, in a Progress interspersed with singing and dancing. She had turned round to me and expressed herself in the most audible manner, to the great delight of that select circle. I attended the party, on the opposite side of the way, for a mile further, and then encountered a Police-constable. The party had made themselves merry at my expense until now, but seeing me speak to the constable, its male members instantly took to their heels, leaving the girl alone. I asked the constable did he know my name? Yes, he did. "Take that girl into custody, on my charge, for using bad language in the streets." He had never heard of such a charge. I had. Would he take my word that he should get into no trouble? Yes, sir, he would do that. So he took the girl, and I went home for my Police Act.

With this potent instrument in my pocket, I literally as well as figuratively "returned to the charge," and presented myself at the police-station of the district. There I found on duty a very intelligent Inspector (they are all intelligent men), who, likewise, had never heard of such a charge. I showed him my clause, and we went over it together twice or thrice. It was plain, and I engaged to wait upon the suburban Magistrate to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.

In the morning, I put my Police Act in my pocket again, and waited on the suburban Magistrate. I was not quite so courteously received by him as I should have been by the

Lord Chancellor or the Lord Chief Justice, but that was a question of good breeding on the suburban Magistrate's part, and I had my clause ready, with its leaf turned down. Which was enough for me.

Conference took place between the Magistrate and clerk respecting the charge. During conference I was evidently regarded as a much more objectionable person than the prisoner;—the giving trouble by coming there voluntarily, which the prisoner could not be accused of doing. The prisoner had been got up, since I last had the pleasure of seeing her, with a great effect of white apron and straw bonnet. She reminded me of an elder sister of Red Riding Hood, and I seemed to remind the sympathising Chimney Sweep, by whom she was attended, of the Wolf.

The Magistrate was doubtful, Mr. Uncommercial Traveller, whether this charge could be entertained. It was not known. Mr. Uncommercial Traveller replied that he wished it were better known, and that, if he could afford the leisure, he would use his endeavours to make it so. There was no question about it, however, he contended. Here was the clause.

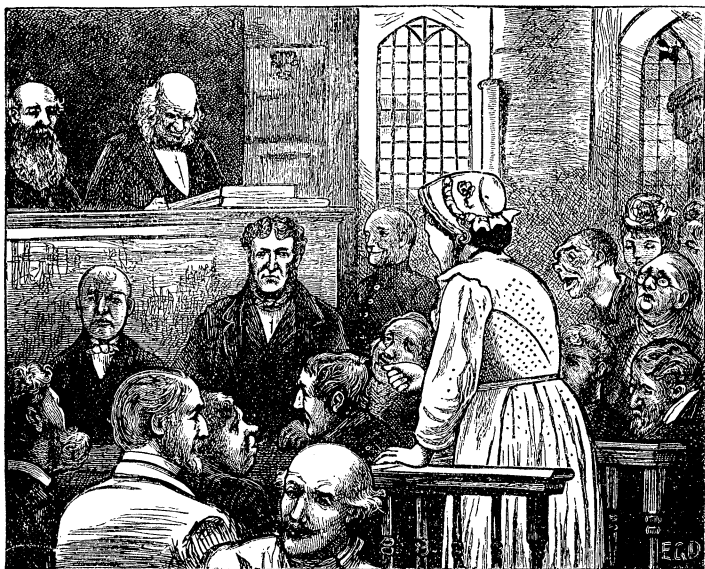
The clause was handed in, and more conference resulted. After which I was asked the extraordinary question: "Mr. Uncommercial, do you really wish this girl to be sent to prison?" To which I grimly answered, stating: "If I didn't, why should I take the trouble to come here?" Finally, I was sworn, and gave my agreeable evidence in detail, and White Riding Hood was fined ten shillings, under the clause, or sent to prison for so many days. "Why, Lord bless you, sir," said the Police-officer who showed me out, with a great enjoyment of the jest of her having been got up so effectively, and caused so much hesitation: "if she goes to prison, that will be nothing new to her. She comes from Charles Street, Drury Lane!"

The Police, all things considered, are an excellent force, and I have borne my small testimony to their merits. Constabular contemplation is the result of a bad system; a system which is administered, not invented, by the man in constable's uniform, employed at twenty shillings a week. He has his orders, and would be marked for discouragement if he overstepped them. That the system is bad, there needs no lengthened argument to prove, because the fact is self-evident. If it were anything else, the results that have attended it could not possibly have come to pass. Who will say that, under a good system, our streets could have got into their present state?

The objection to the whole Police System, as

concerning the Ruffian, may be stated, and its failure exemplified, as follows. It is well known that on all great occasions, when they come together in numbers, the mass of the English people are their own trustworthy Police. It is well known that wheresoever there is collected together any fair general representation of the people, a respect for law and order, and a determination to discountenance lawlessness and disorder, may be relied upon. As to one another, the people are a very good Police, and yet are quite willing, in their good-nature, that the stipendiary Police should have the credit of the people's moderation. But we are all of us powerless against the Ruffian, because we submit to the law, and it is his only trade, by superior force and by violence, to defy it. Moreover,

we are constantly admonished from high places (like so many Sunday-school children out for a holiday of buns and milk-and-water) that we are not to take the law into our own hands, but are to hand our defence over to it. It is clear that the common enemy to be punished and exterminated first of all is the Ruffian. It is clear that he is, of all others, *the* offender for whose repression we maintain a costly system of Police. Him, therefore, we expressly present to the Police to deal with, conscious that, on the whole, we can, and do, deal reasonably well with one another. Him the Police deal with so inefficiently and absurdly that he flourishes and multiplies, and, with all his evil deeds upon his head as notoriously as his hat is, pervades the streets with no more let or hindrance than ourselves.



"AND WHITE RIDING HOOD WAS FINED TEN SHILLINGS."

